My Aleppo: Poems of the Middle East

1996-2024

by

Ann Struthers

The Struthers Family
Cedar Rapids, IA

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Editor's Introduction

Eleanor Ann Struthers, Ph.D. (1930-2024), an author, scholar, teacher, wife, mother of four, grandmother and great grandmother, was an energetic and enthusiastic lover of life. Born and educated in Iowa, she lived most of her life there, completing degrees at Morningside College and the University of Iowa. During the second half of her teaching career, she offered courses in American and Middle Eastern Literature and in creative writing at Coe College in Cedar Rapids, IA. Though based in Iowa, with her husband, Melvin, she travelled widely in North America, Europe, Asia, and the Far and Middle East, twice teaching abroad in Syria and Sri Lanka. At Coe, we were colleagues and our families became close friends, which explains why it feels right in the *My Aleppo* volumes to use her preferred first name in the introduction.

In 1996-1998, Ann was a Fulbright Professor at the University of Aleppo, Syria, where she taught American Literature. Her work in Syria marked a turning point in her life. From that date, much of her scholarship and writing grew out of that experience.

When she died on 24 February 2024, she had published a single chapbook of poetry about Syria, *Aleppo Burning* (2018), but she left manuscripts of three more collections, a memoir in progress, and many uncollected poems. This volume attempts to bring together the poems:

After Babylon (2013)
Revolutionary Acts (2018)
Aleppo Burning (2018)
End of the Day (2019)
Uncollected Poems.

Her memoir forms a second volume: *My Aleppo 2: Memoir*.

Ann's poems reflect on her years in Syria and then trace the course of Syrian history after 1998. When the Syrian civil war began in 2011, like many in the West, Ann was hopeful. Perhaps a few of the subversive seeds she had planted during her two years teaching in Aleppo were bearing fruit. Perhaps democracy would take hold, and both government and society would be liberalized. Too soon, however, it became clear that the al-Assad regime would pay any price to hold power. She saw Aleppo reduced to ruins. She lost contact with many of her Syrian friends. Some escaped into exile. Some she knew had become refugees, and many, she feared, were dying. To her very last days, she grieved over the fates of her friends and of the city where she and her husband had lived happily for two years. Her response to the travesty appears in her poems. How she would have rejoiced at the fall in 2024 of the brutal dictator whose oppression she had witnessed! However her celebration would have been tempered by her knowledge of the deep divisions in Syrian society.

I have approached gathering and presenting the poems as a collector more than as a scholar. That is, I have tried to find and include all of the distinct and

relevant poems and to present them usually in what I believe was the last state in which she left them. I leave it to others to explore what her papers reveal about her composition process and to make judgments about quality.

With both the poems and the memoir, I have, of course, preserved all of her material that I worked with, making sure that copies will remain with her papers in the Ann Struthers Papers in the archives at Coe College's Stewart Memorial Library.

Aleppo Burning (2018) contains poems not directly about the Middle East. In the other collections, there is overlap — some poems appear in more than one collection. The last and probably most recent collection, *End of the Day*, contains a number of poems duplicated exactly or nearly so from the earlier volumes. I have included only those unique to this volume, and that collection ends with a list of her complete table of contents. For *Aleppo Burning*, the one published collection, I have included all the poems, even if they are duplicated elsewhere.

I wish that I knew the names of all the people with whom Ann shared her work and who gave her substantial help. I know that she regularly consulted several members of her family. Among others, I can name Lisa Stroschine and Peggy Knott at Coe College. Of decisive aid to me was Linda Heller. She read most of this material, pointing out problems and correcting errors. Her sharp eyes and thoughtful reading significantly improved this collection.

Terry Heller, Coe College, 2026.

And say besides, that in Aleppo once,
Where a malignant and a turban'd Turk
Beat a Venetian and traduced the state,
I took by the throat the circumcised dog,
And smote him, thus.

William Shakespeare, *Othello*

National Portrait Gallery -- Smithsonian Institution.
"Bayard Taylor" by Thomas Hicks.
See "Black Coffee."

After Babylon (2013)

After the General's Kisses

After mezze — baba ghanoush, hummus with a lake
of olive oil swimming on its surface,
flat bread, celery, peppers — mild and hot,
kibbeh, made three different ways, tabouli,
and twenty other appetizers, the extended family
around the long table on the terrace, thirty
of us eating like locusts,
the hostess lifts the white shroud covering
the lamb, butchered in our honor,
cuts off chunks to barbeque
on long skewers hugged by onions and tomatoes.
Tiny squash stuffed with rice and pine nuts,
huge bowls of potatoes, a small mountain
of stuffed grape leaves, topped with beef ribs,
fish pulled from the Mediterranean that morning,
platters of roast chicken, vegetables in yogurt,
my husband still recovering from the greetings;
the general grabbing him and kissing him on both cheeks.
In the orchard beyond the terrace, one of the general's guards,
an old Bedouin with a rifle, scouts the orange trees,
challenges the birds, dismisses the bees.
The younger guard serves at table, a revolver in his belt.
bowls of fruit, peaches, and white cherries, baklava,
coffee so strong they could have served cubes of it on plates.
After all the food and translating, the children
of the family take us for a walk in the village.
When we return — sun is setting, and we sit on the balcony,
eat watermelon, spitting the seeds over the sides.
The moon rises from the mountain behind us,
outlines the wreckage of the old castle.
We know that this villa could be ruined tomorrow
by earthquake or war, but tonight we sit here in peace
and talk about their daughter in America,
about friendship and education.

Sunday Afternoon during Ramadan with a Christian Family in Aleppo, Syria

In Ramon's salon, sipping crème de cafe,
we hear the cannon announce the end of today's fast;
the muezzins buzz in their minarets;
traffic roars and Muslims rush home for feasts.
But we have feasted since two o'clock,
drunk Lebanon wine, eaten kibbe
and wild cherry sauce for turkey
called Indian here, stuffed with rice and meat;
after every vegetable and salad, pickle and condiment;
after apricot gateau, Spanish flan and fruit;
then coffee, candies, nuts.

We cannot imagine an old woman in Florida,
scarcely care for the color of cockatoos.
In comfortable warmth the picture of Mary holding Jesus
behind George and Sosie glows. We all speak slowly,
too sated for indignation, of the Russian woman.
A dirty woman, they say, a communist come from Moscow,
who developed stigmata, whose fingers drip
holy oil. Why did it happen to her? They ask,
why her, who had not been a believer?

As if in a dream I wonder what marks
this strange country is leaving on me,
why I am here among this richness
and the sweet indiscriminate dark
coming in the windows.

Syrian Roses

O, my spy, my follower, my government shadow,
Here is my schedule: I'm going to pick the park's
roses.

I will cut their slim throats, legal or illegal
carry a bouquet to the illicit money changer,

(green leaves of bills, oval pictures of Ben Franklin;
that old fraud would approve of saving twenty
percent!)

take left-overs to my garage family —
Five kids and parents in the single-car garage.

No window. They get water from a spigot
outside the door in the dirt street.

She gives me tea, heavy with sugar; we sip it,
sitting on a plastic rug she brings outside.

Her face is tattooed with blue flowers. "Qua-is,"
she tells me, beautiful. She's pregnant again.

What can we say to her, Ben? Hard work? thrift?
every day is hand-to-mouth, even the baby

knows this as he crawls in the dirty street,
a piece of flat bread in each small fist.

After You Shake Hands with Assem, Count Your Fingers

abecedarian

Accent definitely Midwestern led us to
believe he was one of us. Gave us
confidence — he and his family could have been
neighbors
down the street from us in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, —
enough that we thought surely his flat's rent was
fair. We pronounced his name "Ahsum,"
good substitute for Assem, said like "ass" which
he couldn't be, this Syrian Ph.D.
in American literature. He and his wife and kids
just about to leave for a job in Saudi. His flat's
kitchen almost modern. His, the only ceiling fans
lifting the desert air in Syria, and the
money, only $800 a month. We were rich
Americans,
nothing better on the market. The balconies
opened with screen doors — another innovation
Syrian
people hadn't yet adopted. If I felt somewhat
queasy by his Chamber of Commerce bonhomie, I
resisted my doubts. We had to decide, hotel too
expensive.
Sara, his five-year-old asked if I spoke Arabic, "I'll
teach you," she promised, taking my hand. She
understood, and he understood even more about
us,
victims ripe for the Old Phoenician trader's touch —
his
wife persuaded Mel to buy a dozen of her
cookbooks,
Xeroxed pages of family recipes. They were all so
helpful.
Yes, yessing and smiling, their white teeth like
zippers closing the deal.

White Station Wagon

The Mukhabarat's* white station wagon,
the color of fear, is parked down the street
from our flat. Even the curtained neighbors,
paid to spy on Americans, shiver.

Two from the car stroll by as casual
as mosquitos searching for blood
past our door. It's hard to look casual
from Mukhabarat's white station wagon,

and our door is the last on the dead end.
They stand there smoking their Marlboros.
We're Americans, so we're not afraid,
though two from the car stroll by casual.

Are they checking on us? Someone else? How
long
Will they lounge there as if they belonged?
Of course, they must spy on each other, also,
where our door is the last on the dead end.

Should we stroll out and wave so casual
at the thugs from Mukhabarat's white wagon?
Do they check the report on us, false or true?
or knock on our door on the dead end?

Note
Mukhabarat — the Syrian government's most feared secret police.

Quarreling in Aleppo

Assem's friend owes him money; Assem says
Friend will arrange TV, settle his debt,
but when TV Man demands his payment,
friend denies it all. Assem won't answer
his phone in Riyadh. I cancel the check.
Mel defends Assem. Believes he's honest.

For now we have only each other and
English. We quarrel over the check to
Assem but softly so the neighbors won't
hear us: whispers, hisses, kettles at boil.
Family across the hall won't speak to us
Christians. Mel yearns for TV and U.S.
football, basketball, and all the sports scores.

We find out Assem's scheme is the oldest
in Arabic history, cheated Xerxes,
Alexander, probably Abraham, too.

We purchase CNN European,
unintelligible British accents,
but love Aleppo's buttery colors,
cool stone balconies, my students' laughter,
history beneath our feet. (No U.S. Sports.)

We acclimatize, forgive each other.

Sestina for Syrian Monuments

In Aleppo, where Abraham stopped to milk his cow, the glory
that is past is writ in stones. Centuries ago Hittites built
upon this holy site. Their temple's foundation hides
under layers of sand and soil, its cornerstone carved
with lions. Later Greeks and Romans built monuments
from its stones for their temples. A Byzantine church, a mosque

built on these same ruins — holy places always holy, the mosque
and its minarets now fitted out with amplifiers for the glory
of Allah. Thrice-mined stones furnished newer monuments:
for newer tyrants, slabs for the city gates, the fine palaces built
for the caliph's harem, its windows gracefully carved
with lattices where unseen ladies could hide

unseen, looking out at the passing world. Built to show, not hide,
rulers constructed castles and the graceful walls of Omayyed Mosque's
mosaics — willow trees, palms, gardens — from tiny *terrace* carved
on six sides, depicting an oasis paradise, the imagined glory
of Eden beside sweet streams, all green and gold, built
by desert folks who knew paradise was water, fountains, monuments

to coolness. Their castles from plain stone, their khans, monuments
in ablaq. Black basalt and white limestone, arches hiding
nothing from courtyards for the camels, souks for merchants, built
for trade — silk, tea, frankincense, pepper, cinnamon. No mosque
at Apamea, broken by earthquake, war, yet, two workmen kneel to glory
of the chant they cannot hear and old stones listen in their carved

intensity. Before Palmyra fell the coffee house's lintel was carved,
before the Crac des Chevaliers was betrayed, the storyteller, a monument
to times gone by, held forth, his tales' origins lost in dusty glory.
He recites while old men smoke narghiles. Tea boy hides
and listens, forgets his job, forgets the call from the mosque,
while storyteller carves the well-known plot, the way the story's built

into smoke, tea, stone, into the lives of listeners, built
into their breath and bones. Time's dull knife has carved
their faces and their father's faces. Quakes shook Marbrak Mosque
in Bosra where a camel brought the first Koran to Syria, a monument
broken among the tall, white gravestones that lean, hid
among the cacti, fallen like all the kings of glory.

Great rulers built what they planned to last forever — monuments,
but all stones topple, none can hide, even those superbly carved
for churches, mosques. What lasts? Only the story's glory.

Lifting the Mediterranean Sun
Tartus, Syria

Fog in the harbor at Tartus,
far off the great cranes' stiff necks are swathed in grey veils.
They will unload the tanks, troop carriers, munitions.
A small craft creeps toward Award Island
where wooden boats are still shaped
by shipwrights who know how to coax
a curve into pine planks.

Ghost ships hang on the horizon,
waiting for the Harbor Master's permission.
They might be Phoenician craft, home from Cyprus
with beaten gold and alabaster,
or Anthony's doomed fleet, although he doesn't know it yet ,
or Crusader ships, the soldiers in their righteous armor,
ignorant of the silks of Syria, its carpets woven
with figures of carnations, roses, sinuous vines,
peacocks and antelope.

With my coffee on Munzer's modern balcony,
I direct the morning's debut,
urging on the sun,
and at eight o'clock the shepherd girl,
wrapped in her black abayah,
will come on her donkey with 100 brown sheep.

Phlebas the Phoenician

Phlebas the Phoenician, once as handsome
and as tall as you, fills all the glasses.
He can write in Ugarit's forgotten script,
it's bird-track characters metamorphosed,
into these signs I learned in nursery school.
He pours the Johnny Walker Black over
crackling ice. Does it matter that Richard
the Lion Heart is rotting in prison?
That Saint Peter, tired by his journey
that leads to crucifixion, rests beside
the sea here at Latakia, named, may-
be for Alexander's sister? She's present
tonight, her pretty pout as famous as
her hair.

Oh, I have been here several lives
before, have climbed these marble stairs, entered
this same door, listened to the cocktail chat,
have laughed, will laugh some more. From down the lane
a statue of the Virgin sings a song
no one knows. Beside this sea Deborah
weaves tents; Paul weaves arguments from Plato's
thought. Hear him in the middle of the room,
his voice booming with Pharisaic zeal,
one eye still bandaged, though it, too, will heal.

My love sits by the window, looking out
at the olive groves' wind-blown silver leaves
swaying like prisms from knotted branches.
What is given is different in this
country. Paul takes a glass of wine for his
stomach. Linda and Mike take two; Peter
drinks three — no excuses. The Commander
of the Legions does not come; we discuss
his bribes, his summer house in the mountains.
Helen flirts, Clytemnestra's smile is grim.
Cleo and Antony worry about
jealous Portia home in Rome, yet draw
toward each other, magnet to iron.

Maybe none of us can help ourselves to
become better. We are a motley crew,
lovers, murderers, martyrs, small-time crooks
taking bread from the poor.
Zachariah
changed. Mary Magdalene, and a few poor
fishermen, geniuses for punishment,
Saul of Tarsus transformed into Saint Paul,
tent-maker, traveler, light-struck thinker,
man for the times, gloriously fallible.

The Tomb of Queen Shub-ad at Ur

Queen Shub-ad of Ur
had to die when her husband died
to honor him properly.
When they carried her into her tomb
above the dead king's, her ladies
crouched around her bed,
the queen, shrouded in beads of gold,
lapis lazuli, carnelian. She wore gold chaplets,
the five-flowered hair-pin of a queen,
a beaten gold hair ribbon over her elaborate wig,
her extra wig on a shelf beside her.
The keeper of the wardrobe
lay beside the cedar chest of dresses.
In an adjoining chamber the grooms stood
beside the red and gold painted chariot,
the two asses that pulled it.

In the center of the room, the bowl of sweet poison,
the small cup beside each body.
They could hear clods thumping
on the roof as the grave was filled in,
tramped down. The little musician
pulled songs from the harp
until the last attendant slumped,
songs for the blue sky of Ur, the yellow brick palace
baked in the sun, a quick glissando, a few plucks
for laughter, a little love song for the soldier
away at the war. Then she, too, drank, fell forward,
her fingers still poised on the strings.

The earth carries the music's vibrations
around the world again and again. Those who
hear,
tremble. And somewhere down the long corridors
of death, all the rooms of the graves meet.

Footprints at the Temple at Ain-Dara

Two black basalt lions, once sitting on their
haunches,
have been waiting for us so long they've toppled.

"The past is a bucket of ashes," a box of rubble
and stones. The past is the old wind from
Macedonia.

In the river valley below an ancient Arab plows his
field
with his team of donkeys. Slow in the sun, and
slow.

Ishtar stepped upon these stones and the weight
of her glory sunk her footprints in granite.

"Not heaven itself upon the past has power;
what has been has been..." the dead bury their
dead.

Two storks — we can see their black wing tips,
their red legs — circle, searching for updrafts.

The Prophet's pointed shoe printed in limestone at
Basra
and where his dagger rested, it burned its shape.

Holy places and miracles: *Halep* where Abraham
stopped
to milk his cow. The Crusader's icon which weeps
holy oil.

The winged sphinxes on this frieze would fly like
storks
if they could, the seated lions would get up, stretch,
roar.

I would roar, too, not for the past, but the future
of this desert country where we breathe the dust of
the dead.

St. Simeon, the Stylites

It's hard to be really fond of some saints.
Their rigidity and harshness repels
those of us not given to fasting, faints,
visions. Still he could cure leprosy, spells
and fits. Monkish, he tried to get away
from people, wouldn't let a woman near.
His mother had to keep her distance, stay
out of sight. He perched on a stone pillar

three meters high, increased the height later.
Some say he stayed there constantly, iron
collar kept him from falling off in sleep.
I'd like to think he came down, ate supper,
said his prayers, met the pilgrims from Briton,
his hands shaking miracles to make them weep.

Star Routes

For centuries *bedoon* crossed the desert
by night, navigating by the stars. Their
cousins, who settled beside the Persian
Gulf learned to fish for pearls, found they could
steer
their dhows on the sea as well as camels
in sand, sailed around Ethiopia's
horn by star-reckoning, found Africa
waiting for them. From night skies they read
practical mathematics. Arabs and stars
inseparable.

They translated the Greeks: Hippocrates,
Archimedes,
Euclid, who had looked on beauty's bare white
bones
before the Middle Ages wrapped Europe
in suffocating ignorance.
The caliph, perhaps hoping for
new astrological revelations,
ordered the translation of the tables
predicting the moon's phases, comet's paths,
eclipses. Al-Fazari found zero!
its double arches forming the gateway
to the new road of mathematical
abstraction. Some say the zero
originally slid down the mountains
from Kabul, now suffering behind its own
disastrous dark.

Al-Khawarizmi, member of Babylon's
House of Wisdom, discovered algebra,
"science of reunion and reduction."
Mathematics — a proper and safe
inquiry in the days of religious
orthodoxy. Its answers certain,
divorced from equivocation, walled off
from philosophy and literature.
Numbers, innocent as birds and babies,
shone like the great stars.

Floating at Carthage

We wander among the ruins, the foundations
of little houses, floors of *terrase*,*
some still intact, one with black and red
Greek key borders; we find
the forum, the baths,
the present President's compound on cliffs
above them, so we must not point
our cameras in that direction.

Having seen enough toppled pillars,
we pause at the cafe and sip our sodas,
among the fallen, fluted marbles,
and think of the woman who lived
in that little house, who put yogurt to set
in the evening, in the morning cooked flat bread
on a heated stone beside the doorway, washed
olives and grapes for the children,
and looked out at the sea below,
waves coming in languidly,
bearing the boats of the Roman army,
floating innocent as leaves
on the turquoise water.

Note
Dictionaries are not helpful in determining the meaning of this word, usually translated into English as "terrace." I speculate that Struthers intended "terrazzo."

Islands

The men gather at the Forum, at the Baths,
watch Aeschylus and Euripides' dramas at the theater.
The men gather at the mosque, at the chi houses,
smoke nargihlas, listen to the blind story-teller.
The men gather in the coffee houses, the Mermaid Tavern,
puff on that wicked weed from Virginia,
tell each other lies.

The women are islands at home, surrounded by high walls,
quiet under veils or burkas, or overworked in London's
drafty, damp stone houses. No man is an island
but women are kept in circumscribed places.
Pepys says, "my wife, poor wretch."

"Then the ship perished and she was cast on an island
by a wave of the sea." The island of herself, still,
there is "no lover like an island shore
for lingering embrace." For lingering embraces
the girls spend their gold,
squander it, tossing handfuls of it before them
like petals for a bride's path. Slender foolish things
that live a day, an hour ... one supreme hour.
Their poor lives, "the arch of a crescent; so many years
lead up to it, so many weary years decline."
They expect islands in the sun, dream of the distant
Hebrides floating in veils of mist.
Later they hold new, starry strangers in their arms,
emptied of the miracles they have born,
yet still bedizened with the wonder of it.
Foreign to telescopes, alien to mathematics,
denied the alphabet, they go to sleep
and dream of untriangulated stars."

Oh, girls, women, mothers, did you ever scheme
for oars, tillers, center boards? would you
have sewn your sheets into sails?
Would you have died for wings?
What do you whisper in the leaves and grass?

How to Hunt Wild Animals
Saudi Arabia

Herds of oryx and gazelles, graceful and swift
cross the desert, but their delicate legs cannot
outrun
Land Rovers and the young princes,
white kaffiyahs thrown back from their eager faces.
Their high-powered rifles spatter blood across the
sand.
All the hundred princes live well,
graduate to shooting mountain ibex from
helicopters.

Abandoned carcasses bloat in the sun
for buzzards, kites. Buffalo Bill's ghost
oversees the slaughter. He has not witnessed
so much gore since he murdered the Nebraska
buffalo.
Mounted heads and horns adorn desert palaces.
The golden desert rabbit trembles in its den;
jerboa emerges, hastily drinks his morning dew;
even the viper and sand cobra shudder.

Jesus as Tourist

In Damascus a local legend says that when Jesus returns he will appear on the third minaret of the Omayyed Mosque, part of which was formerly a Christian church.

When Jesus comes again to set
a thousand years of sweet peace in motion
he will oblige. On the third minaret
of the Omayyed Mosque, like Saint Simeon
the Stylites, he'll appear, his robe
saffron, just to please the Damascenes.
Then he'll descend to open this long clogged
well's mouth, fill the stone font, weep at the screen
by the grave of his cousin John's head; find
the gray granite wall where the strong basket
holding Paul was lowered, kneel at chapel
in Ananias' basement; pray the blind
receive new sight, drop coins in the casket
for the poor, emerge into sunlight, dazzled.

Jesus as Tourist [Another version]

In Damascus a local legend says that when Jesus returns he will appear on the third minaret of the Omayyed Mosque, part of which was formerly a Christian church.

I think when Jesus comes again to
set a thousand years of sweet peace in motion
he will oblige. On the third minaret
of the Omayyed Mosque, like Saint Simeon

the Stylites, he'll appear, his robe
saffron, just to please the Damascenes.
Then he'll descend to open this long clogged
well's mouth, fill the stone font, weep at the screen

by the grave of his cousin John's head; find
the grey granite wall where the strong basket
holding Paul was lowered, kneel at chapel
in Ananias' basement; pray the blind
receive new sight, drop coins in the casket
for the poor, emerge into sunlight, dazzled.

After the Sublime I

Zenobia claims to be Cleopatra's granddaughter.
Some say she poisoned the king, her husband.

The sculptor carved him in a long toga,
looking better in stone than in flesh, she says.

She rides at the head of her army, carries a sword.
Romans indulgent with far-away provinces.

She declares independence. Too much. Aurelian
chases her toward the Euphrates, brings her to
Rome

in golden chains for the procession with elephants,
lions and gladiators. Back in Palmyra

they throttle the men, kill women and children,
behead Longinus, her Greek advisor.

After the Problem in Palestine II

A naïve girl, a simple village girl, refuses to bow
down,
spits on the statue of Caesar, the god.

The Legion's commander would capture her,
but she leaps on her father's horse, rides toward
the mountains

knows every footpath, stony twist, and shortcut,
comes to the granite wall, and the soldiers

know she's trapped, but the stone opens, takes her
in;
they cannot find her. Curses and curses. Finally
they turn, leave.

St. Thecla lives in a cave with her nuns, prays
and does good work in the villages.

Even in death works miracles. The cured pilgrims
leave silver replicas
of crippled hands, arms, legs. Today's Mother
Superior

serves us strong Arabic coffee. Tells us about her
orphan girls.
Shows us the chapel the painters are making a new
white.

Queen Zenobia, St. Thecla, the chase begins
everything,
and the destination is not on any map.

Black Coffee

A Morning in Damascus

Thomas Hicks painted Bayard Taylor wearing
his Egyptian costume, lustrous white pantaloons,
elaborate turban, seated on a red and green carpet
high on a hill overlooking Damascus
which is still a small town
floating beneath blue minarets. Jebel Anti-
Lebanon,
gray and denuded in the background,
anchors the horizon.
Its cedars were sacrificed for Solomon's temple
and everything else — trees so lovely in form,
in lasting scent, they were harvested until the red
soil
their roots clasped slid down
exposing the mountains' skeletons,
and their hard hearts.

Near the top of the canvas, entering the stone
portal,
Achmet carries his tray, small glasses
of coffee thick as oil. Near Taylor sits
the hubbly bubbly, a few striped rugs,
a curved scimitar in the left foreground.
It is 1855, five years before the Druze
massacre 10,000 Christians in the mountains
and within the city's walls.

But Taylor is confident, happy with trappings
of the traveler, the requisite souvenirs.
You know the air is fine, sun benevolent,
and after eating flat bread, olives,
and yogurt for breakfast, Taylor
will continue making notes for his book,
*The Land of the Saracens: or Pictures of Palestine,
Asia Minor, and Spain.*

Holy City

Flat white rooftops under a tropical night sky,
a few palms fringing the horizon.
In my recurring dream from childhood
I race across the rooftops,
leap the narrow alleys. Here and there
a dome mushrooms before me.
In *Notes on a Journey from Cornhill to Grand Cairo,1844*
William Makepeace Thackeray describes the place precisely:
his pension in Jerusalem!

I look at my white arms for the faded evidence
where the tattoo artist needled the three blue crosses
of the Holy City, feel in my pocket
for the hawker's mother-of-pearl shell
carved with the figures
of St. Jerome and his lion.

Centuries do not divide
or continents and countries contain.
There is only the holy land
of the imagination.

Mother of Violence
[Another version of "Holy City"]

Flat white rooftops under a tropical night sky,
a few palms fringing the horizon.
In my recurring dream from childhood
I race across the rooftops easy,
lightly leap the narrow alleys. Here and there
a dome mushrooms before me.
In *Notes on a Journey from Cornhill to Grand Cairo, 1844,*
William Makepeace Thackeray describes the place precisely:
his pension in Jerusalem!

I look at my white arms for the faded evidence
where the tattoo artist needled the three blue crosses
of the Holy city, feel in my pocket
for the hawker's mother-of-pearl shell
carved with the figures
of St. Jerome and his lion.

Thackeray's party rode down the coast,
through the mountain pass,
armed with rifles against bandits, marauders.
Always the weapon, Always the distrust.
Always war of one kind or another.
Biblical walls breached, beheadings, crucifixions.
This worthless scrap of land, no oil, little rain,
holding back its astringent beauty,
fought over by every armed band in history.
Oh Holy Land of death, destruction, diaspora,
Holy Mother of Violence,
at war, at war, at war.

There is the dream.
There are the facts on the poor bloody ground.

After Babylon

Omar Khayyam at Naishapur
a rubaiyat

The Shi'ite court is rigid, no thought free
from scrutiny, but Omar studies astronomy,
mathematics, safe studies for a sage
the mullahs suspected — apostasy

in his blood. He cannot let them prove it.
When his caliph dies, he thinks it prudent
to make the Mecca hajj with believers
before retiring to his rose-splendid

walled garden in an obscure provincial
town. He sets a gourmet's lavish table
with fruit and cheese, the best red wine. He pours
the first taste on the ground. Some old fable

demands it, but more, Omar says it gives
the thirsty dust of some old drunk who lived
ages past a taste he longs for. Omar
claims he listens to the fugitive's

tale, kisses cup's cold lip. "This life flies."
Omar in his garden does not disguise
his predilections for the here and now
"One thing is certain and the rest is Lies."

While faithful Saki brings the cheering cup,
old scientists tell jokes, repeat gossip
and laugh that they have seized, at least, this day.
The Moving Finger writes and then gives up.

His friends listen to his verses, commit
them to heart — they're dangerous — can't be writ
for the grim guards of true religion would,
if they knew his thoughts, kill the heretic.

After Babylon [Another version **]**

(Omar Kayyham at Naishapur)

The poet says, "The bird is on the wing."
He could have meant so many different things.
Where philosophical thought's dangerous,
did he speak in metaphor, the bird's wings

his theological dissent, not caged, but free?
He lived at rigid courts — astronomy,
mathematics, safe studies for a sage
the mullahs suspected — apostasy

in his blood. He cannot let them prove it.
When his caliph dies, he thinks it prudent
to make the Mecca haj with believers
before retiring to his rose-splendid

walled garden in an obscure provincial
town. He sets a gourmet's lavish table
with fruit and cheeses, best red wine. He pours
the first taste on the ground. Some old fable

demands it, but more, Omar says it gives
the thirsty dust of some old drunk who lived
ages past a taste he longs for. Omar
claims he listens to the fugitive,

whispered words he hears the drinking cup
say. Lip to lip the vessel from clay slip
tells him, "Drink up! for once dead you
never shall return." And Omar's very glad to gulp

such advice, and kisses its cold lip. It,
too, may have been some lovely girl he kissed.
He feasts with friends, he drinks the wine, (his
verse
is written down years later) — he recites

for a few discreet companions, exiles
too, maybe from intrigue, from frowns and smiles
of those in favor, those without with knives,
those whose inner meanings are sheathed in style.

"One thing at least is certain: This life flies,"
Omar in his garden does not disguise
his predilections for the here and now
"One thing is certain and the rest is Lies."

While faithful Saki brings the cheering cup,
old scientists tell jokes, repeat gossip
and laugh that they have seized, at least, this day.
The Moving Finger writes and then gives up.

What Omar knows of certainty he found
in algebraic proofs, and its profound
logic, provability. Numbers sit
as permanent as castle walls' surrounds.

He discovered the cubic equation:
$x^3 + a^3 x = b$, his solution
demonstrated by a parabola
using intersecting conic sections

still stands with his verses. His gardens gone
in Naishapur. His stars have turned the wrong
direction. Caliphs, good and bad are dead,
and dust reclaims the walls of Babylon.

The General's Village Near Tartus

Here in a village of the Alawite
at sundown, going home, a donkey's bell
clanks slowly, while orchards catch nets of night;
gravestones lean like tired ghosts. A citadel
still guards the ancient pass, though teeth of quakes
have gnawed battlements, crunched arches, spit stones
into the moat like olive pits. Moon breaks
over the mountain, elderly guard sighs, leans
against the door, young guard takes his pistol
from his belt, but only the wind's scouts lurk
through vines. The general reads history,
sips arak: Greeks, Romans, Genghis Khan, Turks.
The long-haired sheep are quiet in their pens.
The world still goes on when one world ends.

First Draft

Opening the Stones' Lungs

A man of no particular age sits at the construction site
all day breaking old brown stones from the fields.
His mallet and hammer tap, whack, crack,
turns them into uniform smaller shapes. These,
with mortar, form walls, exterior and interior
for the six-plex flats. Later the skilled workmen
cover the exterior with limestone facing, the interior
with plaster. Stone walls, cool in summer, cold in winter,
stone giving off its stone breath

Immortality, Aleppo, Syria

Stonecutters and their sons
labor in sun that blasts color
from the buttery limestone. Each block
measured and fitted on six sides.

Boys who leave school
when they're 12 carry the quarry's blocks
on their bent backs to the tables
where fathers and uncles operate electric saws
that whir and whine; stone dust flies,
no goggles, no masks.

The artist comes and traces patterns
for the best cutters to carve out: palm trees,
lion on the lintel, Corinthian columns with acanthus leaves
twisted pillars, stone lace for balconies.
They are seekers, discovering grace
within what is solid, stolid, obdurate,
manufacturing the doors for its entrance.

I bring them the photos I shot
of them working. They boil tea on a gas ring
atop a squat bottle of *mazoot.* We sit on stone blocks,
add sugar to our small glasses of tea and stir.
They have no English. I say, "American,"
and point to myself, then to their work and say "*quais*,"
and they grin, nod in agreement, "*Awah, awah, quais."**

They know sun is hot, tea sweet,
labor endless, and they die at 45
from lung disease, leaving monuments
built to last 1000 years.

Note

*beautiful

Wild Flowers, Tame Stones

Red anemones bloom among the yellow mustard.
Wild orchids, eight miniatures on a purple stem.

The village girl seldom attends her classes.
Father won't allow the dormitory, won't give her bus money.

I don't know whether the student's stories are true.
But I believe her. The father is the law.

Pale blue iris bloom in the spring field
beside tumbled granite from the ruined castle.

He insists, "You wear the hijab. Cover your face
with a black veil, wear a long coat, black gloves."

Daisies and pink dog roses that Cleopatra loved.
Purple phlox and red buttercups nod against white rocks.

She pleads, "How can I pass the examination?"
Girl, I don't know. Girl, you have no rights. No jobs for women.

The cherry trees bloom so pink she believes in love.
Her family pressures her to marry her cousin.

Her husband will take a second wife. The children are his.
Her family won't take you back. She must get used to it.

Two cows, yoked by a tree trunk, plow the stony fields.
The stones are legion, have been lying there ten thousand years.

The orange blossoms drive the bees mad with their sweetness.
Honey stored up for winter that's already icing the heart.

Strolling on Shara Nile
during the Feast of the Eid

The black-faced sheep huddle beside the mosque's wall.
Red stains on the sidewalk where the slaughter began.

A curled ram's horn, broken and bloody at the base, discarded. It's not a musical instrument.

Somewhere the spit is turning. The poor will have
meat tonight. Maybe. The minarets are chanting.

This is not a song, not a lament, but a rejoicing.
I will sacrifice a green-jacketed watermelon,

it's red juices running out on the altar,
or a pumpkin, its seeds spilling like pale silver coins,

or I can walk down Shara Nile and deposit
golden sunshine on Sabile Park, green with many splendors,

full of children in new, holiday clothes,
little girls wearing flowered hats.

Danger
Doors in Damascus

Ancient wooden door carved
with elaborate stylized flowers
and vines that grew only in imagination,
the knocker, a brass hand of Fatima,
lintel so low a man
had to bow his head to enter.
It was a sign of trust to extend
his neck, not knowing who might stand
on the other side with a scimitar
when he was in just the right position.

Oh, eunuch with the sword,
lucky hand of the prophet's daughter,
for any door that opens, no one knows
what waits on the other side.

Dogs in Syria

A society where to be a dog
is to be lower than dirt, lower
than worms in the dirt,
lower than shit.
A whole country without dogs
until traveling north through
the Orontes Valley, at the edge
of a smoldering dump grounds,
two: Thin, black and tan;
their tongues hang out
like their wolf ancestors,
guilt in their gait,
trotting fast, knowing
even in refuse they are scum,
trying to stay alive.

The Lean Cats of Izmir

The lean cats of Izmir
sit on the shore licking their fur
as Agamemnon's tired crew pulls
into the cove; crouch, waiting
for scuttling vermin as Alexander's men
overturn brown boulders to build the walls
and turrets of Ephesus. They watch with topaz
insouciance while Cleopatra rides,
her chariot decked with dog roses,
to meet Mark Antony. Their slit onyx eyes
observe Hadrian's temple crumble.
They singe their whiskers in their green vigil
as the old port of Smyrna burns.
They are practical cats, patient,
and their tourmaline claws are ready.

Spitting in the Wind
at the Dictator's University

Oh, my grey shadows, informers, state spies, you are the salt in my soup, the savor, the flavor. I love skating the knife edge of danger, and when I go home, say my good-byes, I'll miss your carefully noting my lectures, hoping I'll say something against the regime, the religion. Re-read your scribbles: see that I said, "Old Walt Whitman, Poet of Freedom and Voting." I said it. I admit this American fault. And "Emily Dickinson questioned God's goodness." Oh witnesses for true religion, did you report this grievous error? Did you write down the wicked passages from Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter,* citing the position of powerless women? That the girl students grin? Here's a harlot made heroine, a serious subversion! They pay you so poorly for all these reports, but you need the money to keep you in ciggies, to buy you a pair of knock-off blue jeans. May you keep the texts, highlight the words that seep like water through stone. Or if you forget them, dismiss them, sell them, then Emily, Walt, Nathaniel, and I spit in the wind.

The Watchers

Who is watching behind the curtains,
peering through the ovals in the metal blinds?

The clouds are never certain, changing; tonight
they slip through the dark blue sky on white feet.

Hale-Bopp will not come round again for two
thousand,
three hundred eighty years. We will remember it
then,

remember how we watched it from the balcony
in Aleppo, Syria, through German binoculars.

Display, dismay, dismiss, love is always
tenuous, looking for its way out, way through.

Way into the looking glass. You see your eye
in the dark pool of wine in your wine glass.

We listened to Handel's "Water Music" in the
daytime.
Sometimes at night we heard Liszt's "Mephisto."

Sixteen branches of the secret service spying
on each other, too busy to listen to the music.

We couldn't share our picnic with those ghosts-like
plumes, diamonding space with ice crystals

or with those omnipresent spies from the dark side
of the moon, assigned to draw out

a secret or two, a transgression, a sin,
a faux pas, a wrong turn, a confession.

The End of Diplomacy

In Damascus when the silly Chicago girl brought a mangy white kitten with yellow puss in its eyes to the American diplomat's reception, the kitten proceeded to scratch in one of the flower pots. We who were watching were not responsible for the kitten, although some of the guests suggested it was a political statement. However, the kitten was embargoed. No one could trade with it, because trade was risky even if it had been legal because the kitten hadn't been vaccinated, surely had a dread disease, which we would all catch if we petted the scrawny, mewling creature. None of us wanted to die or offend the diplomat, a kind and intelligent man, whose job was to be a megaphone for policies made half a globe away. Of course none of us recognized that the globe had split and that we were all falling into the crevasses while the Bedouin servants brought around drinks and hors d'oeuvres. I don't know what happened to the kitten, but the girl joined the army, the diplomat moved to a more important post, and I came home with stories to tell which no one wanted to hear.

Dancing Among Women

American and Kuwaiti Women at Mai's Party

When the door closes behind the Sheik
Mai whips off her head covering,
as do the other women,
shaking loose their thick, black hair.
Like nuns freed
from their habits and coifs,
they come to life, chatter like birds.
— even the old grandmother tries
her few words of English.
I try my Arabic.

After the banquet
someone turns on the stereo
and intense Arabian music throbs.
The Kuwaiti women kick away
the Persian rugs,
kick off their Italian shoes,
and dance — solo —
short, fast, hesitating steps.
Their hands dance, too.
They tie long black scarves
around their hips
and rotate,
rotate their stomach muscles.
Belly dancers!
these modest Moslem matrons!
They tie the scarves around us,
and we dance awkward,
but feel the desert sun,
hear the flutes,
bump with the heart beats
on drumheads
made from fine sheep vellum.
We dance the rhythms
of this place of the past
where the dust of our ancestors
dances. We dance and dance
They open their mouths
with wild, high-pitched cries,
trilling their tongues;
they ululate, ululate, ululate.

Sufi Dancing in Aleppo

The double-reed flute plays the sand in the wadies
breeze luffing the olive trees, its surge
through the mountain cedars, through branches
still growing and those cut down, burned
or made into coffins. Flute plays
the wailing of women.

Drummers hold the drum heads
over the brazier's coals to tune them;
when they are warmed,
musicians tap footsteps,
bang hoof beats, beat hearts thrumming with desire
to be taken out of this world, out of this flesh,
to rise with the wind of the spirit.

Old teacher touches one dancer's shoulder,
young man begins to twirl.
His long, weighted white skirt bells out
and he dances great wide circles,
the enormous emptiness
of the universe, of the hollow heart,
then spins in ever-tightening circles
of despair.

Flute plays summer's heat, camels searching for
fodder,
white stones ablaze. Old teacher touches second
dancer.
He leaps into the invisible circles written on the
floor.
He dances infinite kindness of Allah,
ever enlarging ripples of forgiveness,
twirls with the dizzying delight
of the longing for God.

Old teacher touches the boy child
who plays the smallest drum.
He moves into the center, finds small circles,
rotates as the earth rotates, believes he is turning
the whole world with his body. He teaches
tomorrow.

Their skirts flare like enormous funnels
filled by the Presence
alive on the stone floor.
Ecstasy leaps inside their bodies;
its fire skitters beneath their skin,
whirls as their flesh whirls,
kindles fingers and feet.
They dance the wind, the whirlwind,
the storm from the Caucasus
heaved from the great lungs of God,
dance the breath of the world breaking up
to be reborn again.

There Should Be Joy

Hamida Market — Aleppo, Syria

Evening: On the way home from the market,
drums, drums,
where four streets come together, a crowd on
the cobbles.
We recognize the men from the yogurt store, old
lady
with blue tattoo on her lip who sits on a stone step
all day
and peels vegetables,
polite boy from the housewares store,
fuzzy haired kids who play soccer in the
streets.
University students recognize Mel and me,
bring us
to the inside of the circle, give us chairs. A
wedding celebration!
A sister is marrying. Then refreshments —
cool water
from a common glass, hot tea from common
cups
We cannot refuse. Three drummers drumming
and dancing simultaneously inside the circle and
dancers
in a ring around them. "Dance, Dance," they invite.
The conservative husband beside me declines;
he's miffed because I recalled Assem's check,
miffed because I was right,
but I dance and go round and round.

Middle class Muslims in the city do not approve
of these villagers who paint garlands, palm trees,
pictures of the Kabah on doorposts of pilgrims
who had made the hajj to Mecca. They are
shocked
that men and women hold hands together
in the dancing circle, but these people are poor
villagers
who don't know any better.
And the dancing goes on all night.

Soldiers Dancing in the Park

Aleppo, Syria

On weekend leave, but no money,
maybe enough to buy one cigarette
from the street vendor who sells
Camels from an open pack. Maybe enough
change for a can of Orangina.
The music is a small drum and the beat
of their boots on the floor of the belvedere
where they dance on Fridays.
The old men on the benches
designed by the French, clap for them.
Small children at play watch,
little boys look longingly
at the uniforms.

That was yesterday. Today no one
sits in the park's sun, and the soldiers
train their guns against
each other.

Dancing at Aqaba

Aqaba's cannons are still pointed out to sea,
but like Lawrence, we come from the north,
past the track to Wadi Rum where he camped
with the Arab raiders before descending
on the Turkish garrison from the rear.

We drive the modern highway
from Amman, past the pink stones of Petra,
past desert villages with camels staked out
beside the little mud-brick houses,
here to the Red Sea with its jeweled reefs
where a white town hangs like a painting
on the distant cliffs.

At the Sea Club's New Year's Eve Party
local folk, with their children and babies
cluster around tiny tables;
fathers hold their little sons in their arms
and dance the Arab dances. We made up our
quarrel,
dance the slow tunes. At 12:15 waiters pass out
hats
and noisemakers and the only other table
of Westerners, Brits from Sun Oil, call for A*uld Lang
Syne.*
Content to have conquered the old year,
we sing off tune, remembering other times and
places.
Tonight is sweet and warm and we stroll
back to our hotel under stars that waltz
in the new year's sky, and in a dark alley
I'm sure I see all the dogs of the town dancing.

The Fires around Us

The pangolin, Marianne Moore's armored artichoke,
with his prehensile tongue, a pink ribbon,
long as his body and more flexible, searches out
termites two by two and one by one.
National Geographic's ultra-violet night lights
trace his transmigration, as he moves, all of a
piece,
as if on caterpillar tractor treads,
rolling forward on his knuckles.

The screen flares
with a lightning fire during the dry season,
I hear terrible crackling, screams of birds —
watch wild dogs run beside the ibex,
all one terror-stricken herd.
Grasshopper's juices roast, pop and snap.
The spoonbill, not fastidious in her opera feathers
of peach and green, wading where little frogs
hide in stinking mud, screeches, takes flight.
The swamp and its nearby forest burn into the
night.
I know the pangolin, too slow to outrun
the insatiable flames is dead, but no,
the camera searches the charred, still smoking
landscape, and finds him poking
his pointed-cylinder snout from out
someone's old burrow. I hope it was
the first pangolin I saw by night, not some
stand-in actor, but after such destruction
the audience needs hope. I need hope
for the greater conflagrations of this world:
Turks killing Kurds, Kurds killing Kurds;
Jews killing Palestinians, Palestinians killing Jews;
Iraqis killing Iraqis — and Iranians;
Men killing their wives — or just beating them;
children abused. Or children hungry, whose
parents
want to feed them but cannot. O God, one
pangolin
saved from the fires of hell, and so many lost,
so many sweet lives cut off. Who will become
their intercessor, to speak
for the unknown millions of common people
who want a little peace, a place to grow
a garden, raise a few chickens,
a little charcoal for cooking, a blanket at dark?
In this great, rich world, just a little place,
a small haven, a burrow safe from the fire?

Bones

I think the dead
Care little if they sleep or rise again.
Aeschylus

Throw the bones, shuffle the cards, read my fortune
in tea leaves. Alexander's flesh and bones are
dust.

Lacemakers at sunny Dutch windows hold
their threads with bone bobbins. Old women knit

with bone needles. Oh, I am poured out like water,
and all my bones are out of joint.

Juliet's nurse, her bones old, her news new,
while the girl's heart is wax, melting in its bone
cage.

I have felt like that: "Zero at the bone;"
when your hand touched me, all my bones froze.

I am afraid of many things, but not of the bones
the street curs worry with their mean muzzles.

What was made of my bone and flesh denies me,
a secret sorrow, a hollow place, a missing rib.

Caesar dead, Cleopatra and Marc Antony, Hadrian
has left his gates, all of them gone, their bones
crumbled.

Mother and David sleeping till the last trumpet,
their bones deep in the dark, indiscriminate earth.

Sometimes I hear the rattle of bones in the wind,
but never the knock I long for at the door.

The End of the Day

To watch the sunset at Wadi Rum
We ride across the desert on benches
in the back of the 1950's pick-up
past the petroglyphs on the red rocks
to the outcroppings worn smooth by eons
of time with sand in their teeth.
The princes in their long sheepskin cloaks,
fleece turned to the inside, whirl past
in a new jeep. January wind skirls.
Sun diffuses from marigold
to pale peach, persimmon, coral,
cerise, rust, sheen of crimson.
Clouds' edges lit with gold
like Bible pages, finally suffusing
into cool mist, fine as silk.

Lawrence and the Arab army
camped here, exhausted but exhilarated
because the Turks at Aqaba thought
no one could cross the fierce wilderness
behind them. The camels ridden hard,
men ridden harder by their fantastic hopes.
Tomorrow their triumph. I can still feel
it here where Lawrence sat, knowing the sun
that evening set on an age, and he must have
shivered,
as I do, as he thought of what was to come.

Blood and Guts

The jackal lives in a ziggurat, or maybe he lives in a different room at the end of a different tunnel every night. In the butcher shop in Al Jedayea, smoked tongues laced together on strings hang like deflated brown balloons. Maybe he has a double or double doubles. He plays off Hamas, Islamic Jihad, Hezbollah against each other. Should he tell the old terrorists, "Gentlemen take your bombs and go home, please?" As if their home countries would take them back. As if they'd go. Guns turn two ways. Garlands of sausages, fatty-tailed sheep's tails. The jackal lives in a ziggurat; he is not well, his heart hurts. Red and gristle-blue carcasses suspended from iron hooks, only a little smaller than the figures dangling from the scaffold in Hanging Square. His lackeys report every night on all his friends and enemies, and his chest feels like it's swelling and about to burst.

Morning after the Earthquakes

I wanted a fair sun, a warm breeze to reassure me,
but today stares at me, caring no more
than the disembodied eyes of Mari.
Last night I slept poorly after the quakes.
The first tremor was like all the giants in the earth
gnashing their broken teeth,
chandeliers swaying even when we came back
into the house, my knees reluctant to obey me.
We had just started to laugh, the three of us,
Mel, Melissa, and I when the growls began again,
this time smaller, softer, only the prisms swinging.
I remembered Ephesus to the north in ruins,
and Palmyra to the south, its columns tumbled,
scattered like sliced bananas on the broad Roman
roads.

It came the way a ship shudders sidling up to the
quay,
but this was no gentle bump, dock to hull,
no lover's warm body beside me, hip to hip.
This force shook the earth as a dog
shakes a rabbit. Now the force of war
stalks additional rifts,
stumbles through dark faults
toward Dara'a, Homs, Idlib,
shaking Damascus,
and precious Aleppo.

Jerboa

Its leaps should be set
to the flageolet....
Marianne Moore

Dear jerboa, Dr. Jassim Al Hassan,
ecologist, doesn't know why you came
to the petroleum lake formed when unburned crude
drizzled out, left its tracks down the wadies
when Iraqis torched oil wells, doesn't know why
you waded in to die. Marianne wrote
that you were happy, content with your poverty —
so it must have been curiosity. Or perhaps the oil
smelled of pheromones, and you are undone
by sexual desire like so many others.
Now your silk whiskers are leaded with tar,
and your Chippendale paws clutch air.

Small cheerful rat, who asked for almost nothing
drinking no water even in this desert,
there are not enough riches
in this world to satisfy the greed of the mighty.

They would take everything,
even the sevenths and intervals
of your long leaping kangaroo dance,
and the single seed you needed
for your daily meal.

Controlling the News
Aleppo, Syria

Those wild airwaves would not heed
the dictator's dictates
but bounced off on their own,
attaching themselves to the grey ears
positioned on windows of the flats
in Medico and University, made nests
in the wiry antennae on the flat roofs
of Engineering. Everyone listened to
the Egyptian and Saudi soaps during Ramadan;
some heard the news on Europe's CNN —
children learned English that way.
Worst of all, some watched
old American films on Channel Israeli.

All of this illegal, so you could be arrested
at any time. Even the Chairman
of the English Language Department
at the University — the police confiscated
his, hauled it away. He bribed it back
but he understood the warning:
His Ba'ath Party shadow thought
he was too chummy with the Americans,
and the police station keeps a cell ready.

Taking a Second Wife
Aleppo, Syria

Rula drove her father's second car,
a used Mukhabarat station wagon,
all over Aleppo, parked where she pleased.
Cops on the beat raised their hats to her.
Tight sweaters, tight jeans; she wanted to be
an American girl in a society that called her
Disgrace.
An old friend of her family insisted
on taking all of us, Mel and me to lunch at the
Sheridan.
He was forty, confessed his wife didn't understand
him;
they hadn't had relations in years. He looked
at her longingly. She didn't look up, attacked
the rack of lamb before her. He said his friends
advised him to take a second wife.
Rula would never be a second wife.
Rula would never marry her cousin, either,
who besieged her with their grandmother's
blessing.
In Syria a man can have four wives simultaneously.
even rich old liars.
We pitied him and his pitiful story,
and Rula called the waiter, ordered baklava for
desert.

Open and Closed

The chaos of cupboards, clutter of closets — she
was always filling cavities, another babe
swelling her belly. She began to understand,
then, the astronauts and NASA, filling up the
enormous empty voids with agitating space
junk, their abandoned technological brats. O,
the darkness of space, blacker than mud, blacker
than
the rain forests of Java, blacker than coffee
in a white cup — all the stars sprinkled like sugar.
Black holes like mouths slurping from the universe's
saucer, the shuttle Challenger, its doors blown off,
Christa McAuliffe opening like a tulip
to disaster — long minutes of terror before
the anesthetizing plunge into the cup of
the black ocean.

She knew the swinging doors moved two
ways. "Fortune leaves some door open for
remedy."
What remedy did it find for your poverty,
Miguel Cervantes? for your wife's relatives who
despised you, for your literary rival who
wrote the sequel to your book? The future's pale
door?
but the future is chary of present, doesn't
put paella on the table today, doesn't
open the doors of the Andalusian jail.

Doors of the Duomo's Baptistery, bronze relief
depicting paradise, are half of all the doors
in the world, closed or open, half way in between,
always coming and going between Heaven and
the Underworld, whether or not she knows what
way,
her face is set. Sometimes she can hear the
humming
of the two-handed engine at the door. There are
those who know terror in the house — Blake says
Pity stands before that door. Pity in her rags. Who
can move the hinges for her, force the tumblers in
the lock, or listen to their rhythms and guess the
secret numbers? St. John says seven, but there
are
more, elusive, exclusive. Maybe the cabal
knows, or the fortune teller in her painted tent —
with the human head sectioned into gardens of
jealousy, anger, percipience, genius,
compassion, distrust, criminal thoughts, affection.
The wind bells its contradictory compartments
gently. Perhaps the collective number of stars,
number
of drops in the ocean. She grows weary counting.

She drifts in clouds of dreams and hears "...far off,
at some
forgotten door, a music and a faint carouse...."

Falstaff, Pistol announce the old king is dead
as a door nail, and the two drunks stare in their cups
but cannot see poor Yorick, or their own white skulls
soon to be licked clean by the grave's ambitious worms.

The cup of kindness yet, the cool cup of water
that lifts her up, weary from the sun, the harvest's
chaff, the heavy load. Who will come into the dusky
stone house, eat a supper of bread and honey, milk
in the cracked cup where the pitcher never runs dry?

The cup that cheered the Scots farmer, so poor that when
sowing wheat, he took the sheet off the bed for seed
bag, dipping in, casting out handsful that fell on
the fresh-plowed field, the little mice waiting for it,
and a harvest that never paid off the landlord.
Scything, he sang, and composed new songs, the music
of joy in the rocky fields of disaster.

Some doors shut firmly, locked with vapor locks; after
the soul's selection there is no appeal, even
though she doesn't weep when the husband starts from slumber,
though "gusts shake the door." Who can explain this drawing
away? She did not will it nor want it, but it
has come to live inside her chamber door.

Romeo finds the cup, clos'd in his true love's hand.
She found it emptied of true love when Romeo left
her for sweet Rosaline — O, he was a lover,
She knew he wouldn't make a good
husband, but she remembered the kisses they both
realized were the last cup's kisses, and there was
nothing sweeter.

The piano knows a master's
touch, opens its black door and becomes a living
creature caressed beneath his fingers, his touch timed
and precise as the moon rising regularly
each night for a million years and the tides turning
with it, the ocean's ears attuned to corals, star
fish, delicate white squid, floating like an angel
close to the rocks where it hid. Agonies of angels
and oceans of tears, salt from the old time mothers
and blooming sea anemones, petals as pure
as angel's feathers. Doors open their maws and close.
No one escapes the door. She cannot break out
through the windows with the fires of sunset caught in
their glassy mouths.

She had seen the gates of poor
Arab villages resplendent with high arches
and gold lettering, beside them mud walls plastered
with thorn branches, thorns of oppression, protection
for mud huts and scrawny goats bleating. Gold bracelets
are a woman's protection against want. She thought
her friend had much gold jewelry, but Marva married
a Circassian professor with no money.
Marva fashioned wooden bead screens for her windows,
controlling patterns of light and darkness coming
from the universe's great heater. In this room
she said, "I will be the pattern-maker."
Steaming
cup of coffee in the translucent china cup.
Rich in the tropic's aroma — Somalia,
Ethiopia. She remembered Gunzawli roasting green coffee
beans, shaking the skillet over the open fire,
turning them hot and brown, their bittersweet perfume
released by his little hand grinder, all the while
water boiling in the pot. After he married
the two, all the richness of Africa, jungles
of her imagination, the taste of Eden.
Yet, Homer knew there's many a slip 'twixt the cup
and the lip. That 'twixt, that place
that's neither here nor there where miscalculation,
interference of the gods, the throw of the dice
make the difference. Twixt. Verge. Teetering on the edge.

She had been
cursed with the Wexford curse: "May your own blood rise
against you, the sweetest drink you take become
the bitterest cup of sorrow." The bitterest
cup was the empty cup she was never allowed
to taste. She came too late, and the rules wouldn't bend
where merit had no merit. The pygmy fools
obfuscated, got drunk on their own power,
stood on the highest step and sang off tune about
the greatness of the faculty, the privilege
of knowing her, but the supermarket's check-out
girl wouldn't accept the coins of her prestige
when she tried to buy hamburger.
Fifteen-year-old
Kevin died of childhood leukemia. Two years
later his older brother, Michael, died of AIDS.
The parents wept their eyes

dry, and their hearts. They are bent like reeds.
Who can
offer the cup of strength in their great agony?
Except one who lost his only son to bitter
death. That comfort seems far away. The mother
clings
to her old friend, doesn't want to let him go, knows
she must. The father goes into the woods and
beats
his fists against stones.

As a child she could not drink
from the cup of understanding soon enough. She
was always thirsty for the cup of human kindness,
parched for the sweet cup of love. She would have
given
her life for the secret cup of still and serious
thought when her high school friends were passing
the bottle
of peppermint schnapps. Still, she stands between
these doors
in the vast darkness of unknown space, space
between
here and there where chance tosses the bones —
the crystal
cup of felicity, precariously on
the table's edge, and she doesn't know whether
she's
coming out or going in.

That cup of thought, more
intoxicating than Samsian wine, more comfort than
the brown
beer at the Ferry Tavern on the sweet Avon,
or the pale ale beer at The Old Bear in Windsor.

There is the child, cupped in the womb, a religion
of the child, always miraculous. Always an
unknown planet circling the future, it is hope,
more than hope, more than the blind mind can
understand.

The lid to the coffin snaps shut, the final click —
a door that seems closed. Who knows? Houdini
has not
returned to present the map for reentering
the tunnel, reversing the push against the bones,
sucking in the exhaled groans of the lost mother.
There will be trumpets at the last day, and no one
living can stand against the music from their bells.
The dead will revive and put on the garments of
immortality. If they spring the locks, loosen
the jambs, rise up in their own sweet flesh with
wonder —
O, the dark cave of the grave will be vanquished.
She
wishes she could believe it. She wishes her heart
were more commodious, her poor brain in its bone
cup able to fathom the unfathomable —
that the doors of faith could open for a yearning
skeptic. O doors, shaken, broken, opening in
to the room where the old poet carries the moon
in a silver bag, where the sun is lifted up
and presented in a golden cup!

Snow Angels

One winter in Damascus, surprising the desert,
it snowed! I showed my students,
who were studying *The Scarlet Letter*
and *Leaves of Grass,* how to lie on their backs,
arms straight at their sides, and then extending
them,
plow that white snow with their hands
above their heads, making great wings
for snow angels!
In ten or twenty years it will snow there again,
and those students will teach their children
and they will say, "A long time ago
this is what my teacher taught me."

When It Snowed in Damascus

The palm trees put on white hoods,
saber cacti were sheathed in cotton wool,
children licked it off the balcony railings
as if it were whipped cream.
It stayed for a remarkable 24 hours and every car
in the city sported a snowman on its roof!
Pick-up trucks carried snow people riders.
All the photographs of the Great President
on University Avenue had bushy snow eyebrows.

Everyone laughed. They laughed a lot
over little things. When the old lady
who was throwing her garbage
out on the street nearly hit me
with a plastic bottle, we both laughed;
students running to catch the bus missed it,
and they laughed; the girl who cut the party cake
which fell apart, laughed. They all laughed
when the Great President's eyebrows
slid down over his face.

their laughter was lighter than snowflakes,
as strong as spider silk. It was the fabric
that protected them in that place
where the desert is unfailing, dark
as the secret police and dependable as their
poverty.

Good Friday in Aleppo

Before the shelling and the bombing, before the civil war
Christians in Aleppo visited all the great churches,
praying in each one, washing with cotton balls
from the dish held by a child, the wounds of the wooden Christ,
life-size and supine, before the altar.

Today Aleppo's burning.

Who will repair the shattered houses,
the broken bakeries? the blackened souks?
Who will bring back the innocent and the guilty dead?
Who will wash the wounds of the country?

Will it be the rifles waiting to blast those who kneel
before the altar?
Those who pray the curse of God
on the shooters?
But we have begged you in previous ages,
and you did not come.
I think you will not come now.

O Christ, Aleppo's burning.
Rise up from your wooden sleep.

Homs

I remember your mosque's blue and white Nain carpets, vines and tendrils entwining the muezzin's sweet call, the old woman watching her fish tank — the brilliant splinters, the brief fountain of fish. The Brotherhood (dear God, they call themselves Brotherhood) forces Alowites out of their houses, cleanses all arrondissements of Christians, Sufis, Kurds, Shi'a, waits for the chance to get rid of the fierce Druze who have always kept their rifles hidden. At Dara'a all the poor Sunni villagers, ragged goats, rocky fields, the government's secret police arrested, knocked out a few teeth, broke a few legs, so suspicious of the villagers that they became what they were suspected of. Idlib, your stolid mountains where old women carry home branches from the woods on their heads and backs; the young dream of the wealth they believe the government steals from them. Syria, you have suffered marauders, Hittites, Egyptians, Greeks, Romans, Crusaders, Arabs, Genghis Khan, Turks, French, and now the dumb bullets kill everyone in the path, and the children die on the street like wheat cut down in the field. Those who define Justice as REVENGE harvest every day, every evening, load their guns again after the call to prayers.

Horses

"And Allah took a handful of wind... and said to it, "I create thee, Arabian."

Ishmael knew the secret words
and all the wild horses ran towards him,
put their manes beneath his hand,
yielded themselves to his will.
Commanding the winds, he knew, "the best
place on earth is the back of a running horse."
The horses of the wind fly without wings.

At home in Spirit Lake, Iowa
the slim yachts drive into the foam, crew
tugs at the sheets, leans out from the gunnels
for balance, only the narrowest line
of hull hissing, knife edge against water,
and the only song is the wind's bright song,
not high-pitched
and sweet as the *mujajil* of a red Arabian.

The Prophet prohibits cutting off manes,
tails, forelocks, "because their tails act as whisks;
their manes warm them, and their forelocks are blessed."

The mainsail, jib, and blessed mizzenmast —
there is no day like today — eighteen knots, gusts
out of north by northwest, waves high, judges' red boats
bobbing at the course markers, decks covered
with spray, swift as the animal brought by Gabriel on the night of ascension
to the seven heavens, white, oh *shabah*,
with a chest of rubies.

When I think of all the races, water
and desert, elements of fire and earth
beneath wind and water, wagers I've made,
that we all make, the roads of sand and sea,
parted, dividing, taking you, good friends,
Wayne and Kay, to Brasilia; dear David
and Judy to Kuala Lumpur; Don,
gone deaf now, to the little house beside
rough brown boulders of Maine; Lita, living
next to the soft marshes of Florida; Trudy and her Dave
on the Chesapeake, the golf course stretching its octopus arms
behind their pink brick house; Kathleen, happy
and unhappy in Paris, one or two
I loved, but could not love enough, lost now,
lying where nothing can touch them today,
nothing but these salty, futile kisses.

I listen to the gallop of enchanted horses,
the gallop of wind which blows where it will
through the red mane, the white spray,
across deserts and grasslands, coming at last
to the sacred lakes, to the house at the shore,
the centrifugal center where all is calm,
where wind and water become the same element,
where I can hear someone singing a song
sweeter than the *mujajil.*

Remembering the Moon

Setting down gently on the tarmac
beside the sea at Athens' airport,
this airliner might have been a white gull.
Waves come in, the color
of black pearls glowing with nacre.
Perhaps old Homer paced here once,
remembering Agamemnon and Iphigenia
under this same full moon,

She ascends the mountains, unhurried
in her course. She doesn't care
that Homer's gone, that I am flying
to Tunis and writing these lines.
She slides upward on silver tracks,
all the same, all the same.

Do you remember the night the moon
rose out of the Tartus Mountains?
We sat on the balcony eating watermelon,
spitting the seeds over the side
into the black garden below,
the ruins of a Crusader citadel behind us,

And another night on Monhegan Island
off the coast of Maine, our bonfire
on the beach, the children singing camp songs,
pulling their sweaters down over their knees
as the wind freshened, the tasseled larches
silhouetted
against that moon's mirror?

No poets, no knights walked there,
only the ghosts of starfish, the broken shells
of old crustaceans, as if we were the first
explorers and this were a land so new
that only the moon had seen this before us.

Not Knowing Why
Spirit Lake, Iowa

Adolescent white pelicans squawk, rustle, flap their
wings,
lift off in a ragged spiral at imaginary danger.
What danger on this island in the middle of Spirit
Lake? They're off to feel
the lift of wind under their iridescent wings,
because they were born to fly,
because they have nothing else to do,
because wind and water are their elements,
their Bach, their Homer, Shakespeare,
and Spielberg. They wheel over the lake,
the little farms, the tourist village with their camera
eyes.

In autumn something urges
them toward Texas marshes. They follow
their appetites and instincts, unlike the small
beetles
creeping along geometric roads, going toward small
boxes,
toward lives as narrow or as wide as the pond,
as glistening or as gray as the sky.
They do not know why. They fly, they fly.

My Country, My Family

I have never gone any place
without carrying my country with me,
baggage never checked through
but lugged from terminal to terminal,
this burden of what I am,
the worst kind of contraband —
never searched, never detected.
Once I lost it in Paris
where lovers can do anything,
where for a little while
I evaded my Prussian father,
my pillar of salt mother,
escaped Iowa's plains of interdiction,
and its glaring, suspicious sky.

Mother Country

At Great Spirit Lake
seemingly innocent clouds
drift past, but I recognize
Aunt Effie and little Agnes,
stuffing pillow ticks with goose feathers,
Mother and Vivian hang white sheets
on the blue Iowa air.
Harriet and Sylvia dance over snow drifts with
Ishtar,
the *Girl with Amphora* from Aleppo drifts past,
pouring milk from her bottomless jar.
The old aunts swim beside Artemis
who wears her lifejacket of pomegranates.

I see that the old gods and the old people
who have gone before have not let go,
will never let go, have disguised themselves
a little, but they still hover here
in the pregnant, puffing air.

Aleppo Burning (2018)

Though some poems from the earlier collections appear again here, I have included them to present this whole published collection as it appeared.

The End of the Day

To watch the sunset at Wadi Rum
We ride across the desert on benches
in the back of the 1950s pick-up
past the petroglyphs on the red rocks
to the outcroppings sanded smooth by eons
of time with sand in their teeth.
The princes in their long sheepskin cloaks,
fleece turned to the inside, whirl past
in a new jeep. January wind skirls.
Sun diffuses from marigold
to pale peach, persimmon, coral,
cerise, rust, sheen of crimson.
Clouds' edges lit with gold
like Bible pages, finally suffusing
into cool mist, fine as silk.

Lawrence and the Arab army
camped here, exhausted but exhilarated
because the Turks at Aqaba thought
no one could cross the fierce wilderness
behind them. The camels ridden hard,
men ridden harder by their fantastic hopes.
Tomorrow their triumph. I can still feel
it here where Lawrence sat, knowing the sun
that evening set on an age, and he must have shivered,
as I do, as he thought of what was to come.

The Two Lives of Aleppo Children's Hospital
Sestina for Captives

Shortly after his capture, James Foley, later beheaded,
was held at Aleppo Children's Hospital.
As reported by the New York *Times*.

In the war with no uniforms, no faces, black masks
at check points. Jihadists? or The Free
Syrian Army? Jim Foley, freelance journalist, after the story
so near the Turkish border he foolishly risked their
nets and snares. Captured, he was fodder for ransom,
propaganda. He could not know what would not save

him. First jailed at Aleppo Children's Hospital, they saved
him for waterboarding, beatings. His captors, masked
doctors of death, specialists in cruelty, demanded ransom,
wanted new, crisp bills, millions to set him free.
European governments paid. U.S. won't pay for their
captives. Journalists left bleeding inside their stories.

Eighteen in one cell. They told each other stories
they remembered from movies, TV. They saved
paper to make a chess set. They quarreled, too. Their
captors tortured them in operating rooms. Hate-masked
jihadist faces at the hospital turned charnel house, depravity free
to captives, anguish to parents who cannot afford ransom.

Before the war, doctors there gave their services for a ransom
to bacteria, virus. They dispensed kindness, cures, a healthy story.
Dr. Hanah, pediatrician, young intern, spent her learning freely,
saving the lives of babies as winter hardened. Saving
them at year's end when government free medicine ran out — her mask
secure against their coughs and wheezes, she attached their

little faces to oxygen, two babies on one bottle, their
breath eased. In winter pneumonia was the enemy. To ransom
them, doctors paid ingenuity and luck. The mother's masks
of hope and dread could not presage a happy ending of every story —
sometimes it was too late, child gasping, turning blue; she couldn't save
them all. She goes home at night, never quite free

from those pleading faces, but she was happy to give her life to free
children from pain and death; broken bones, infected wounds, their
ear aches, stomach aches, childhood diseases. But she could not save
the country from civil war, tribal war. No doctor could ransom
it from religious rancor, simmering for centuries, history's cruelest story.
She prayed her peaceful prayer for all of them behind her doctor's mask.

Before the war, Children's Hospital: doctor's masks
told a story for healing, free
to a generation of children and their families. Now
jihadists' black-masked bloody story
filmed: beheadings, burnings, decency held for
ransom, no captive, no child saved.

Exiles

"…the new conquerors have arrived
and the old ones have gone…and Syria is
distant."
Mahmoud Darwish

On the balcony in Athens, looking out
over the old sea of Agamemnon and Ulysses,
the old sparrows cheep, "Mistake, mistake."
I left the sunrise of oranges and the sunset of
pomegranates,
the birds of regret and the birds of relief.
It was a hard parting, coming into winter,
though now the coiled leaves on the vines
are about to burst their leather shells.
The windows are empty, the waves whisper
nonsense,
but better than the bitter roads I swallowed.

I remember the bishop standing beneath the arbor's
shade,
plucking the purple grapes,
old Bedouin bargaining for tent straps
at the souk, now burned out,
where a boy insisted the silver necklace
had belonged to the Sheik's wife.
I didn't believe him, didn't believe
the sheeps' heads in the butcher's enamel pans,
saffron and sage in burlap sacks.
I remember the carpet dealers' enticements, Sufi
dancers
thrusting swords through their ribs (collapsing?)
coffee seller, coals glowing in the bottom
of his pot, his common cups,
old women harvesting herbs with scissors
on the citadel's earthen glacis,
bright-eyed boys playing soccer in the street;
all that was another spring, summer,
and the last autumn of apricots.

Mr. Ramon brings the black bottles from the cellar.
uncorks them, pours the country we love
into the gleaming glasses, the vessels of then
into the now.
We sit in the sun that does not burn the enemy
the rain that falls on the rocky fields or refuses
to fall from the clenched fist of thunder.

The heart remembers
the flight, even the flight from Eden,
the angel by the gate with the sword.

Exiles II

We eat the bitter oranges of exile.
Little flat in Vienna, far from
the country we lost, country of sweet white cherries,
of spring truffles, knobby and brown,
rose water and laban, the cupboard shut.

We sleep in beds of hopelessness,
the little boys, not citizens, not allowed in school,
the news from home: Dead cousins, grandmother's
heart
speaks mean rhythms when the souk flames
the Citadel shudders. Old bishop captured,
his driver, a young priest, shot.
How to be glad we are saved?
How to mourn for losses thorny as cactus,
rocky as mountains, like seas gone mad,
time and space erased and left us without a moon
or a star.

Last Doctors in Aleppo, June 2014

For Angelique and V.

Before coral, pearl, mother of pearl,
before the chambers of the nautilus,
millions of ancient trilobites, crinoids,
all the little limestone shells compressed
for centuries by the weight of water.
Then lifted up, cut, carved into the city of Aleppo,
Halep, milk of Abraham's cow,
now blasted into flight
by mortars, bombs,
brachiopods flying above the birds.

Everything must be at war, trying to kill.
The last two doctors binding up the wounds
flee now to the mountains
with their three little girls.

Only the sun is neutral;
even the moon betrays,
moving a black shadow,
a broken tree,
a broken country.

Even the broken stones weep.

Long Line Inexorably Moving, April 12, 2016
a double abecedarian

Zoned camps strung with barbed wire. Sandwiches,
weak tea,
yearning wives, their memories of Aleppo (Haleb),
xysters, scraping the bone. Baby cries with colic,

weary children whine; they've all seen too many
dead.

Violence, thieves, the worst and the best, society
united in one braid of misery, the good with the
riffraff

through the slough of despond, viscous bog,
stinging gnats, shoes wear out, deserts, cacti,
thorny brush,

rain, good days and bad, smooth path, rocks,
boulders, steep *wadi*
quota of good luck (Fatima's hand) and bad, evil
eye. Not a holy haj.

Pity exhausted, religion exhausted, hungry, thirsty,
no going back.

Open the waters of daydreams, uncover the well
now for the families, old, young, before hopes dim
—
mountains, another border, another country. Learn
left out. Learn No to strangers. No to refugees from
Aleppo.
Keep walking. NO COUNTRY wants you; it's a no
destination trip.
Justice demolished in Syria, homes blasted, burned
ancient *suq*

ICARDA agricultural scientists fled from the war,
harvest from their experimental fields now in ISIS's
granaries, but the heirloom seed bank, smuggled
out:
fava beans, barley, wheat, lentils to Lebanon's
Agricultural Bureau,
every seed for survival. Refugee maps without a
single isogriv

drawn to a safe place to find work, a little house, a
window
centered on a little garden, vine and fig tree, where
mothers can relax,
be safe, where little girls play *hajla*, hopscotch, are
happy,
and baby laughs for the first time and golden bees
buzz

The Guilty

World, World, you let Aylan Kurdi drown, three
years old and innocent, his only crime
to be born into a desperate family,
desperate rubble, desperate want, desperate times.

The long line inexorably trudges,
to littered camps, wire fence. Great dogs of war
force them onward. Western world begrudges
even a little place, shuts its steel doors.

Only the sea accepts them, only cold
waves embrace them, only old Aegean
takes them in, mother and eight children's souls.
World, World you turn your back without a qualm,
while Mars, triumphant, sings his old paeans
to death's expedients: guns, barrel bombs

Good Friday in Aleppo, Syria, 2014
Armenian Orthodox Church

Supine before the altar, the life-size body of Christ,
carved from pine, wounds of red paint.

The child beside the body holds a bowl
of white cloths for the believers to ceremoniously
wash the wounds.

Outside the great doors, the blasted skeletons of
war.
Inside, enough tears to wash the white city.

Oh, Christ, we have begged you
in previous ages, and you did not come.

Here where feral cats become tigers
and rats grow fat on the dead
buried beneath our broken houses,
how can we beg you with broken mouths?
beg you with broken lives among the rubble?
beg you inside the bombed and broken church?

Have mercy on your poor Christians,
the last fifty Jews,
the faithful Moslems suffering among us.

Come in from the shattered streets,
Come in with saints and prophets,
Come in with angels and visions,
Come in with lightning and thunder.

Hold up your living hand.

Oh Christ, Aleppo's burning!

Ruins at Cyrrhus
Lament for Syria

Take me to the ruins at Cyrrhus
where Linda drove over the lintel
of the Roman house deep in debris,
covered by puddles she saw too late,
its door closed to us forever.

Take me to the coins
ancient or recently manufactured
and buried to grow patina
for the ragamuffins to hawk.

They must be born from the stones
of every ruined garrison village.

Take me to St. Simeon
where the benighted saint
perched on a pillar to prove
his devotion to God

Take me to love and not love,
those twins of the heart,
right ventricle, left ventricle,
same blood pulsing through both.

Take me to the Lost Ark of the Covenant,
to the old world and the new, which is no better.

Take me to the sunsets of sorrow,
tears of grapes in the arbor,
tears of water in the sea,
to war and revenge, that rotten apple,
and the white sheep of forgiveness.

Take me out of myself
Take me to your garden at Latakia
where we will sit at the table
that was once the acanthus leaf capital
of the broken pillar still lying there,
and we will eat flatbread, yogurt, and olives
and watch the sea coming in steady
and peaceful.

Aubade for Aleppo
A Lament and a Remembrance

I pull open the drapes and say, "Good morning,
morning."
How foolish! It's not a beautiful morning,
just average, still grey around the edges,
light pushing open the door.

I remember Aleppo, the small door
in the ancient house, so low
you had to stoop and extend your neck to enter,
not knowing whether the eunuch with the sword
was waiting on the other side.

This morning the guns will stutter again,
the bombs cough through the stones.

But someone will buy warm flatbread at the bakery,
someone will pick up hammer and trowel,
the shovel and chisel, some woman
will wash the wool in the river, string the loom,
someone will finger the oud, breathe into the
Bedouin pipes,
someone will wash a baby's face,
someone will say I love you,
morning unfurling in the grey and gold light.

Revolutionary Acts (2018)

The Graveyard Uneasy

If they are talking to each other,
it's only whisper wind in evergreens,
scurry of some innocent creature,
a gopher, a rabbit or the unseen
memories that tickle the dead, bother

a whiff of fog on graves, hovers.
Stone fingers and stone lips all grown
over, lipping earth's grassy cover
all of them: work-worn farmer's bones,
captain, parson, careless* young lover.

Can their stone brains come back, soften,
become cognizant? Spirits of air
that cannot rest in satin coffins
while nasty stewing stinks appear,
something malevolent and rotten

drifts over the land from Washington:
stink of autocracy, stink of smut,
stink of evil that tore children from
mothers, loud as the sycophants' suck.
Wrestling angels, trapped in heaven

get sick at their stomachs, vomit, queasy.
Even the devils quit paying; democracy totters
and all the rich palms are soft and greasy,
Power tells lies and it doesn't matter,
even stones in the graveyard uneasy.

Note
The typescript word here was "carless."

The Last Days of the Republic

We were too sophisticated
too knowledgeable
too inured
or
too simple
(too incapacitated)

to believe it.

Not here
someplace else
(we could not conceive it)

Where people were ignorant
racist*
rock-ribbed ethnic superior

Bible banging moral superior
(surely it was innocent cant)

But then

they built cages

then they TOOK THE CHLDREN

locked them in cages

(babies, toddlers — all ages)

Then they would not allow
us to see what was happening inside

what was happening
happening
(we couldn't conceive this Faustian low)
(it was impossible)

IT WAS POSSIBLE

It turns out

It turns

Turns

I think they came for you.
I think they came for me.

(can you breathe now)
(there is no breath left now)

Oh
hhh
h
…….

Note
racist: The manuscript word here was "raciest."

Women at the Border

Take away their children and keep them in cages.
No green card.
No green card for modeling New York fashions for
    these women with children,
their faces furrowed, common, figures bent from
    hard labor, fear.
They should know better than to have children they
    can't support.
They should know better than to have a husband
    who beat them.
They should know better than to be born in a
    country of drug gangs.
These broken, brown women.

Take away their children and send them back to
    their shit countries
They're women who don't know better, don't know
    anything.
They don't know women don't count.

Deportation

Cosseted tea pot,
cereal, orange, breakfast on the deck, watching
    clover,
punctuate my lawn, my gardens of carnations,
candy tuft, white and violet vine clematis,
coral bells, and cockscomb starting
to grow their ruddy jowls, calendula,
too summer yet for chrysanthemums,
but cosmos, California poppy, cardinal flower.

None of them native, all imported and improved,
but, oh, oh,
those illegal migrants, illegal aliens
not wanted in this corner,
who crossed my border without permission —
    criminals!
Creeping Charlie, despite its little purple flowers,
that I will have to pull up
cast out
by the roots!

Moral Compass

is out of whack, whirling, whirlpool,
dead zone, maelstrom in the middle
needle gone crazy,
gone into spasms, spells, fits.

But the pole has not shifted
Not shifted yet,
still locked to the mothers
of truth.

The women
All of the wives in *American Gothic*
Iowa farm women
wear aprons,
keep the chickens of common sense
in order
shooing it into place every morning
locking the night against foxes and weasels.
They keep the flag of decency flying
in the storm, keep the house clean
and the manure in the barn.

Guard the terrain of truth
wipe out mouths with soap
shame the lies
jerk out weeds of contumely
pluck out sick prevarications
from their tender gardens
  their hearts turning over
  for the stolen children

Women in aprons lift their garden trowels,
brandish their stirring spoons
wash the Gothic window
and hang new clean curtains.

Dirty Words

The new news
Cleopatra reads it today
she understands

baby cried Chinese tears
Rohingya tears are forbidden
the sacred privileges forbid it
forbid vegetable love,
especially cabbage and carrots
must not mingle — no stew good enough

the sacred cows of Cal Cut
feed them bananas,
feed them rupees and riyals
feed them beggars and street children

feed my people
poison gas and impersonal
bombs dropped by drones
from the secret station in Antarctica

the Preacher says vanity
the darkness says forget it
it's a Putin sunrise
a yacht in the harbor at Larnaca*

answers bereft
of decent questions
Decent is a dirty word

Note
Larnaca: The typescript word is "Larnika."

Revolutionary Acts

"Alternative facts are lies." Jill Abrahamson

Fire is truth
although it burns itself out
as so many do, spending
themselves for pennies
on drink or sex
or the thrill of danger
which is the greatest temptation.
For truth or lies, you choose:
The old General cannot admit
he spent his life for killing
an enemy he did not hate.

Underground coal mine fires,
cannot be put out.
Australia's Burning Mountain
producing smoke, sulphur and God knows what
for 6000 years, Pennsylvania's Centralia Mine
only 55 years. Still, it is safe to assert
that fire is true.

"We do not err because truth is difficult to see. It is visible at a glance. We err because it is more comfortable."

Solzhenitsyn

Water is truth
lifting boats, except those it sinks,
floods over everything

or trickles underground,
reaches up for air on oases,
is life and hope. Ask ancient Egyptians,
the Yemini, the Chinese in the Gobi.

It is highway and byway; it doesn't love bridges
washes them away when possible,
tests their shaky buttresses

Water leached lead from pipes
at Flint, Michigan. Government saved money,
damaging forever developing brains
of babies and small children.
In a country blessed with rivers and lakes this happened.
Water is truth although politicians deny it.

"The truth does not change according to our ability to stomach it"

Flannery O'Connor

Air is truth except in China
where only factories are truth and air is fungible.
Masks, dear friends, cannot filter all particulates
and you will die young, you and your 300,000 sisters.

Mountain air, delicate, thin and precious
Minnesota air, pure, except near the cereal mills.
Air without the bandages of law becomes cereal mills,
Breathe cereal mills or plastic factories,
good for business.
Air crosses borders without a passport,
never discriminates. Doesn't care if a black man
or a Muslim of a Mexican breathes it.
Air, the true, the ultimate democrat.

"In time of deceit, telling the truth is a revolutionary act."

George Orwell

Earth has more characters than a Broadway musical,
Sand, loam, clay, loess, Clarion Loam,
Nicollet silty clay, Blue Earth mucky silt loam,
Wadena loam, and on and on,

Out of the earth all the flowers of the world
even orchids high in the jungle trees of Sri Lanka
their tendrils coiled in the tree's sap
from its roots in the earth.

If you believe in truth, do not lie down with sexy
    alternate facts.
Truth is a sapling, the young peach tree growing —
    that must be tended.

If you must eat, be like the Mesquakie,
get down on your knees on the earth
and give thanks. May the spirit of asparagus
strengthen you in spring
and its lacy fronds fan you in summer.
May your autumn table be heavy with apples
your winter bins be glorious
with cabbage, carrots and potatoes
and may you take a minute or two
(or even an hour in church)
to be thankful.

Earth is the truth.

What the Afghan Chief Knows

The valley remains
and its stream of cold water,
rocks, sand, sheep remain.

The young men hiding out in the hills
play with their guns. Some of them
are our young men.

The strangers in mottled uniforms
who speak in another tongue
will go away.
Their jeeps will break down,
their promises dry up in the ditches.

Then our young men will come home.
to the cold stream, the patient sheep.
Our sand and rocks remain.

Proportion

It's a question of proportion
what is one reporter?
one brown reporter?
not even an American.
what if it were two?
Not proportionally important;
there are thousands of reporters,
one more-or-less, not significant.

Why get excited by disappearance.
torture,
fingers sawed off while he's still alive,
murder,
dismemberment with electric saws,
chunks of body flown
out of the country
not on the backs of angels,
but on private planes,
dumped in the Mediterranean
where there are millions of bodies
over the ages,
what is one more reporter's body
in small pieces?

c. 2018

Nothing Has Shaken Loose

Bug in the box, bugbox bugged

We searched the top of the chandelier after the earthquake

Nothing had shaken loose nothing was loosened on top
Under everything, the seethe with the dark stone plates
(Some say we share a universal dark.)
losing their patience loosing rage pressure blowing steam that was not steam
bugging the young boxed in boxed out too many boxes and no way to open the crates

If you were dissident disrespectful declined democratic
or called demon

suspicious or afraid or you should have been afraid

Egyptian Pharaoh who hunted wild lions
lions with authority teeth
lions hunted out of Syria
jail for kids whose toes do not hold the line
jail for kids with spray can graffiti
Bears hunted out of
Turkey
And others.

Passenger Pigeons shot out of the New World's hopeful blue sky
One tribe best at killing

jail chant for woman with a big mouth

Killing was easy in Saudi
in the old days what days?
we must be tolerant of big money
Big money is blind.

Money greases
all those whirling wheels —

Big money has electric saws in the basement. A drain for the blood
the Assassins' plane goes down
Their relatives received big presents
big money
honor free pass through pearly gates

Money
I lost my mouth
lost my hand in the dark pocket
Chandelier rings with dance Music
Chandelier recording tells everything

Listen, the dark walls are screaming
Listen, the ceiling echoes every language in the world
The moneymasters are writing new books.

There is an old book of admonitions
a later edition of hope
We can ignore them for money.

We have to get out of this world.

The Guilty

World, World, you let Aylan Kurdi drown, three
years old and innocent; his only crime
to be born into a desperate family,
desperate rubble, desperate want, desperate times.

The long line inexorably trudges,
to littered camps, wire fence. Great dogs of war
force them onward. Western world begrudges
even a little place, shuts its steel doors.

Only the sea accepts them, only cold
waves embrace them, only old Aegean
takes them in, mother and eight children's souls.
World, World you turn your back without a qualm,
while Mars, triumphant, sings his old paeans
to death by water, guns and barrel bombs.

Babies Who Don't Know Yet

At Bab Tel Abyad
The great river,
now a thin brown tongue.
Rafetus euphraticus, soft shell turtle,
endangered, its Sumi wrestler arms flailing,
Euphrates eel, writhing in congealing mud.

Refugees in broken shoes
trudge along the bank,
shiver in winter and cold,
Willow trees weep,
no place to hang a harp,
no song left to sing.

They carry
their desperate possessions,
heavy bundles of human misery,
babies
who don't know, who don't know yet.

Evil Eye

Pinned to his baby white shirt
a tiny talisman, tear-drop size,
dark blue, light blue, white glass. Hurts
warded off, even evil in disguise.

Keep at bay measles, mumps, bumps,
broken bones, schoolmaster's switch, bad jobs,
mean boss, war of barrel bombs,
and second wave of bombers that lob

another round to intimidate
White Helmet rescuers who rage,
scramble — hoping not to be too late
to pull you from the wreckage.

Rubble

The collector in Syria

I was the spy in your midst, you suspected me,
nefarious,
and I was gathering the past in my glasses and
earphones.
I heard Marco Polo's* camels bark, complain, toss
their ridiculous heads,
bare their evil yellow teeth. I heard the jingle of
harness
on Alexander's mare, the music of bracelets
on the dancing girls' ankles, on their slender,
golden arms.
I was notorious for listening to the past,
the clank of Roman armor, wind whipping their
sacred
battle flags, sounds of the chisel chipping marble
for white temples. I listened to the instruments
and voices of the past, songs the temple girls sang,
song of wheat in the fields,
Orantes water singing alto and bass
across the wooden fans of the water wheels at
Hama,
song of the Euphrates whispering mountains,
whispering floods and drought, songs of the oud
and desert pipes,
lambs coming home at dusk, bleating softly into the
stone fold,
prayers of the faithful and unfaithful,
song of stars falling through the night sky, blazing a
sign.

I collected the anti-Lebanon mountains, its cherry
trees,
its oranges and lemons, the pines, black as the
basalt of idols
(their staring white eyes). I collected the thick
stucco walls
of Palmyra, the serpentine walls of the old city of
Damascus,
the North's bee hive houses — the sheik's two
wives mixing water,
clay, grass and manure, patting it on with their
strong, brown hands.
I was the spy in your midst. I collected your laban,
lentils,
baba ganoush, falafel, yogurt with apricot jam,
your baklava, your flatbread. I collected your tents
woven with black goat hair, your city, Aleppo
of white sandstone, its twisted pillars, acanthus leaf
capitals,*
your stone lattice at the windows.

I have purloined all that's left of Aleppo,
even the skies, looted of their clouds,
all that's left of the beautiful country, and I give it to
you on this page:

Rubble
and orphans.

Note

Polo's: In the typescript, this word was "Palo's."
capitals: In the typescript, this word was "capitols."

Angels Greet the New Arrivals

June 17, 2015 Charleston, South Carolina

Nine Bible Study transported
sooner
some say cut off off and away some
mourn manymornings
Job heart-inscribed inmourning morning's
meaning in the new light
Isaiah-ing* radiance homelight
radiance second home home
a map of the undiscovered country

Reorienting themselves
Putting themselves together to take in

February 20, 2018, Marjorie Stoneman-Douglas
High School, Parkland, Florida

Strangers on the stairs surprised Surprised

kids
Astonished

trombone kid blows his horn angel
orchestra answers
breaks into rock harps hum
kids torn jeans tee shirts
of cartoons slogans just this side
of inadmissible McDonalds on their
breath
Pepsi and gummy bears

like mothers and fathers
wings open angel-ing
taking them in opening their wingseverlasting
arms
green blue pink feathers shining iridescent
unexpected unexplored country
sky open, cloud free, gravity suspended
regret sluffed off revenge disintegrated,
gone in silvery showers
put each other together

October 26, 2018 Tree of Life Synagogue,
Pittsburg, Pennsylvania

Smoke pillars newbies enroute
one thin worn by ninety-eight years
one still sporting his bow tie
one a runner
one new grandfather
one deaf can't hear shots can't
hear trombones
one widow
one loved Nintendo
one retired nurse
one sixty-nine and tired
two brothers, Cecil simple disabled
inseparablefromDavid
full of Joy every day
laughter and laughter

Kid's turn to newbies,
jokes, they say,
some jokes these mostly grandpas and grandmas,
would understand,
maybe the rabbi, the priest, the pastor

keep them clean.
Bible Study says music
music for sweetness after
the bitter blood

dancing Bible Study says

the Hora now we all know how to dance
dances they know
some music something
familiar

Cheer (not yell but happiness) hold it
in your invisible throats
in their invisible throats now.
They coming now swinging low oh, low
and low oh, sweet
chariot from heart reciting
Job's despair
from heart Isaiah's lamb and blood Hope

Trombones (an accordion now) and the Angel
Orchestra
all together alltogether AllTogether

and a great wind through their angel feathers

ROARS

Note
Isaiah-ing: In the typescript this word was "Ishiah-ing."

From End of the Day (2019)

This collection includes a number of poems from earlier collections. These do not appear here. At the end of this part appears a list in order of the contents Struthers chose for this section.

Traveling Light

I will depart for the green lights
of somewhere, not stop for camels or crows,
take a fast sled downhill to the ancient fortress
of Ghazi, Afghanistan, where zero was found
after the spring thaw, lolling among the boulders
near the Khyber pass, row my boat between the glaciers
calving into the black waves of the North Atlantic
from Greenland, buy a deck ticket on the ferry to Cesme,
watch the sun set on Sounion behind the broken temple
of Neptune. I will light my way with Mexican pineapples
to Cozumel, across the straits to Chichen Itza
where the losers paid with their necks,
take a road that leads to Rome,
eat pizza at Faust's bakery with the little grey nuns

sworn to silence. I cannot go again to the orange groves
of Syria, to the piles of stone in Aleppo
waiting for the cutters to discover lace screens, scrolls,
pediments in the obdurate golden-veined limestone,
fashioning a city of milk white, *haleb,* tribute to Abraham
who stopped to milk his cow.

If the bus drives on and on,
though I cry "*Hon, Hon,"* in Arabic,
till we brake in the terminal,
I won't know the place, can't read
the signs. Or maybe I will recognize it
though I have never been there before.

Ruins at Cyrrus
Lament for Syria

Take me to the ruins at Cyrrus
where Linda drove over the lintel
of the Roman house deep in debris,
covered by puddles she saw too late,
its door closed to us forever.

Take me to the coins
ancient or recently manufactured
and buried to grow patina
for the ragamuffins to hawk.

They must be born from the stones
of every ruined garrison village.

Take me to St. Simeon
where the benighted saint
perched on a pillar to prove
his devotion to God

Take me to love and not love,
those twins of the heart,
right ventricle, left ventricle,
same blood pulsing through both.

Take me to the Lost Arc of the Covenant,
to the old world and the new, which is no better.

Take me to the sunsets of sorrow,
tears of grapes in the arbor,
tears of water in the old Middle Sea,
to war and revenge, that rotten apple,
and the white sheep of forgiveness.

Ruins at Cyrrus [Another version]
Lament for Syria

Take me to the ruins at Cyrrus
where Linda drove over the lintel
of the Roman house deep in debris,
covered by puddles she saw too late,
its door closed to us forever.

Take me to the coins
ancient or recently manufactured
and buried to grow patina
for the ragamuffins to hawk.

They must be born from the stones
of every ruined garrison village.

Take me to St. Simeon
where the benighted saint
perched on a pillar to prove
his devotion to God.

Take me to love and not love,
those twins of the heart,
right ventricle, left ventricle,
same blood pulsing through both.

Take me to the Lost Arc of the Covenant,
to the old world and the new, which is no
better.

Take me to the sunsets of sorrow,
tears of grapes in the arbor,
tears of water in the old Middle Sea,
to war and revenge, that rotten apple,
and the white sheep of forgiveness.

Take me out of myself
Take me to your garden at Latakia
where we will sit at the table
that was once the acanthus leaf capital
of the broken pillar still lying there,
and we will eat flat bread, yogurt, and olives
and watch the sea coming in steady
and peaceful.

Immortality, Aleppo, Syria, 1998

Boys who leave school
when they're 12 carry the quarry's blocks
on their bent backs to tables
where fathers and uncles operate electric saws
that whir and whine; stone dust flies,
no goggles, no masks.
They are seekers, discovering grace
within what is solid, stolid, obdurate,
manufacturing the doors for its entrance.
I bring them the photos I shot
of them working. They boil tea on a gas ring
atop a squat bottle of *mazoot.* We sit on stone
blocks,
add sugar to our small glasses and stir.
They have no English. I say, "American,"
and point to myself, then to their work and say
"*quais*,"
and they grin, nod in agreement, "*Awah, awah,
quais."*
They know sun is hot, tea sweet,
labor endless, and they die at 45
from lung disease, leaving monuments
built to last 1000 years.

Desert Religions

Amid the fiery flowers of prophecy
metaphor is a tree growing in the sands
of Syria, Jordan, Palestine, Arabia,
that becomes suddenly lily-colored in spring,
a thorny pasture in blazing summer,
white sheep, brown sheep, black goats.
Where you are not fooled by mirage,
by the false glinter on the horizon.
Where blessings are rain,
the oasis paradise.
At night the great stars wheel above you
in their astonishing patterns and you have time
to consider them. They may be small bushes
burning in a black desert;
they may be the eyes of God.

After the Quarrels of Mortars and Machine Guns

After the quarrels of bombs and mortars,
her stone house in Aleppo
folded like a tent.

Worn cobbles, haunts of the wise men's camels
tethered in the old khans, stripped in *ablaq*
that withstood the earthquake; old tyrants in new clothes,
and the patient people, living behind the walls,
gossiping and dancing to the drum, their laughter
stronger than police and oppression. She did not accept;
she lived upon refusal, loving the wild iris blooming on the hill,
the Bedouins who knew no writing, no books,
the autumn rains, the winter's winds, women in dark cloaks,
their children scurrying like rabbits, loving the grand vista
from San Simon across the country to the land of the Kurds,
loving the red and green carpets they wove;
standing beside the pillar of the saint, and finding
it impossible to love him who would not allow any woman to look
on him, not even his mother; loving the students who hid behind a pillar
for the touch of a hand, a surreptitious kiss so slight it might not have been a kiss;
temples of the ancient gods, with their giant stone footprints;
first mosque in Syria where Mohammed's slipper indented the granite,
Roman dromedary arched bridges, small cisterns every twelve miles,
St. Luke's portrait of the Virgin that protected
Crusaders in battle in a land that conquered many of them;
pastel clay houses on the ridges of Ma'alula where the old people
still spoke the language of Jesus; cherry trees in the mountains
on the Eastern shore, oranges and grapefruit, blossoms in spring
sifting through the whole country — their perfume must have enchanted
those armored Franks from the cold north.

After time's wheels rolled across the *Jebels* still mourning their cedars,
into the valleys, this is when the engines came,
and the flags, the great countries arming the innocents
who died for what they were told were great causes.

Blue Doors of Sidi Bou Said, Tunisia

> The Mausoleum of Sidi Bou Said was reportedly burned by jihadists. It was the latest of 38 attacks on Sufi religious shrines in 8 months
> October 18, 2012

Music shut down by mortars,
wine poured out on the ancient streets
dancers forced on their knees,
heads in the dirt, blue and white tiles
on the Saint's ancient shrine cracked
and burned so even the shards are ruined,

Oh righteous Jihadists,
How will the babies breathe
swaddled in black,
their mouths stuffed with cotton?
and the mothers whipped for crying?

Where are the bright blue doors
of happiness, the sweet taste
of joy, the holy pipes, the sacred oud?
and the bones of the blessed
turned out to bleach in the desert?

Taking a Second Wife
Aleppo, Syria

My student, Rula, drove her rich father's second
car,
a used Mukhabarat station wagon,
all over Aleppo, parked where she pleased.
Cops on the beat raised their hats to her.
Tight sweaters, tight jeans; she wanted to be
an American girl in a society that called her
Disgrace.
An old friend of her family insisted
on taking all of us to lunch at the Sheridan.
He was forty, confessed his wife didn't understand
him;
they hadn't had relations in years. He looked
at her longingly. She didn't look up, attacked
the rack of lamb before her. He said his friends
advised him to take a second wife.
Rula would never be a second wife.
Rula would never marry her cousin, either,
who besieged her with their grandmother's
blessing.
A man can have four wives simultaneously.
even rich old liars.
We pitied him and his pitiful story,
and Rula winked at us, called the waiter,
ordered baklava for desert.

Note
This version differs from the one that appears in *After Babylon*.

True Miracles

The followers claimed his face glowed
with celestial light, so it was forbidden
for human hands to depict it.
Although he never claimed anything
except inspiration,
never mentioned resurrection,
yet some authorities think he's back.
The Dalai Lama smiles as if he knows,
but he's not telling.
Lord Vishnu says he found him incognito
wearing a Smokey Bear costume.
The Buddha thinks he's hiding
inside the 1950s truck that purveys "gaz, gaz, gaz"
in Damascus. Behind the silver canisters
for cookers, he conducts the band that alerts
the quarter's housewives. Louder
than the ice cream jitney, he plays "Jingle Bells,"
oh, happy tune. He's having a good time
after all that heavy lifting reforming a society.
The authorities could not turn him off,
"dashing through the snow" in hot, desert Syria,
amplifiers on max.

Dancing by Myself

The music tonight is another country
where I tasted sunrise like summer melons,
drank the winter rain, caught the comet
in my binoculars, scattered its seed
over the locked gates, stone walls,
the dictator's decrees, and the secret police jail.

Tonight, the songs that laugh and weep
fill the empty spaces in my bones
with children's voices singing.

Oh, dancers in the round,
the music says be thankful.
So hold my hand, be happy, I'm dancing still
while the drummers drum, the dancers dance,
the night shines,
and the moon is the color of wine in my glass.

Keeping the Spirit

Rumi says to keep the spirit high in a tree's
branches,
so today mine is riding the top of the Small Leaf
Linden,
snow pasted on the trunk's north side, every branch
outlined in Canaletto white, every twig
fluttering heavy white eyelashes. This is February
in Iowa.

In summer I stash my spirit in the willow
overhanging the bank of Big Spirit's Back Bay,
where the white pelicans have their nest.
There the willow holds its green-gold head
to the bright, crystal air, and trails its lower
branches
in the water, making a hiding shade
for the female mallard and her dozen
ducklings. She rests easy while they make
small fuzzy circles beneath the elliptical leaves
writing their own alphabet in the water.

Aleppo before the War and One Stanza After

If you were important, you let the world know.
Two guards with guns at your door, driver for your car
a velvet curtain across the back window —
Importance flaunts its accouterments

If you were a poor peasant with wife, five children,
you came into town when your crop failed in the drought.
You lived in the one-car garage
of a house under construction
where you carried the stone building blocks all day.
Water from the spigot in the street.
Bad luck clings like a shadow to the poor.

If you were a university professor
the university salary wasn't enough
to live a middle-class life, so you tutored
at night or translated, or wrote letters for others,
or if you wanted to live a little better,
you took bribes for grades. If you taught English,
those classes weren't worth much,
You laughed because life was some kind of celestial joke.

If you were a policeman, not paid enough to live,
you spotted imaginary violations
in traffic that were worth a fine, paid immediately,
or confiscated the TV antennae from some householder
because it was illegal, and for a fine you gave it back.
The only magic you believed was the jinn who lived in money.

If you closed your eyes to the massive Soviet sculpture
looming before the door of the post office,
closed your eyes to the judge's hand,
beneath the table, to the government's cousins
and their fine villas in the hills.
If you closed your ears to the screams from the jail.
If you didn't, Discretion would warn your father or your uncle
— tell that kid to shut up.

If you breathed the spring air
redolent with orange blossoms, cherry blossoms,
the whole world was beautiful. On Mediterranean's shore
the sea came in lisping lyrics
as if it were any shore, any lovely shore.
And you knew that here, especially here,
the Goodness of ordinary people paved the streets,
held up the roofs; guided the comet
in its orbit.

If the burgeoned eggplant, squash, apricots in the market
said plenty, more-than-enough, it might have been so;
it was so for some. Sun shone on laborers and those who reclined on cushions,
Wind blew, clouds did not rain, or they did, minarets blasted their prayers
to the faithful and the unfaithful, never telling their secrets,
You try to look only at the graceful palms swaying,
ancient ruins.

Today's ruins,
walls peeled away
like tangerines
shattered stones, cement,
cement dust, stone dust
Cover your eyes, stop your ears
forget the ignorance, arrogance, avarice,
forget the blood still pooling around your feet.

Still, Aleppo

Two walls peeled away from my third floor flat,
a broken chair I found this morning,
my table still standing,
my cup of tea steady on it now,
shelling, bombing quiet at last.
I am looking out from the corner where walls used to be,
searching the rubbled *Shara Nile*, below. Walls of the Citadel
still harboring Crusader ghosts, demolished homes
of the last Jews forced to sell their Hebrew books
to the junk man and leave everything,
and those million others who left carrying their sorrows
like baggage, their backpacks of tears
to Sweden, Germany, camps in Jordan,
already growing their tent pegs into permanent roots.
I am looking at rubble of lives, rubble on Aegean's floor
where the octopus inspects drowned dreams.
I left you, Syria, Aleppo, Idlib and Homs, Museum in Damascus,
Euphrates border town where Seena lived with Jews, Christians,
secret Zoroastrians, Kurds, Ismalis, Sunnis and Shia'a
side by side, all giving, partaking, no one killing.
I left you all. Now pieces of us broken in Toronto,
Athens, beautiful Vienna, but although I tell myself,
I am gone from Aleppo forever.
I am still sitting in a broken chair in a broken room
in a broken Aleppo, and below the broken walls
on the glacis of the Citadel, mint is again thrusting
its persistent leaves toward the sun!

Nothing keeps mint down, nothing kills mint.
Not war, not beheadings,
Not even revenge. Between broken stones,
Mint says, enough of hate. Too much of hate.
Here on the last floor
of the last flat on the last street in Aleppo, the scent:
born-again
mint,
sweet, ignorant,
indestructible mint.

Complete Contents of *End of the Day*

The End of the Day
Traveling Light
Ruins at Cyrrus
New Construction (Also titled ”Exiles.")
First Draft, Opening the Stones’ Lungs
Immortality, Aleppo, Syria,
Good Friday in Aleppo, Syria,
Desert Religions
Holy City (Also Titled: "Mother of Violence")
After the Quarrels of Mortars and Machine Guns
The Fires around Us
Two Lives of Aleppo Children’s Hospital
Blue Doors of Sidi Bou Said, Tunisia
Long Line Inexorably Moving, April,
Babies Who Don’t Know Yet
The Guilty
Aubade for Aleppo,
Exiles (Also titled "New Construction," appears twice in the collection)
Last Doctors in Aleppo, June
Star Routes
Sestina for Syrian Monuments
Phlebas the Phoenician
The Tomb of Queen Shub-ad at Ur
After Babylon, Omar Khayyam at Nashaipur
Jesus as Tourist
St. Simeon, the Stylites
Black Coffee
Lean Cats of Izmir
After the General’s Kisses,
Dancing among Women
Syrian Roses
Bones
The Watchers
Footprints at the Temple at Ain-Dara
Danger, Doors in Damascus
Dogs in Syria
Wild Flowers, Stolid Stones
Taking a Second Wife
When It Snowed in Damascus
True Miracles
Snow Angels
Sunday Afternoon during Ramadan with a Christian Family
Strolling on Shara Nile during the Feast of the Eid
Sufi Dancing in Aleppo
Dancing at Aqabah
Jerboa
Lifting the Mediterranean Sun,
The General's Village Near Tartus
Horses
Dancing by Myself
Keeping the Spirit
Not Knowing Why
My Country, My Family
Mother Country
Aleppo before the War and One Stanza After
Still, Aleppo

Uncollected Poems

These poems seem not to have been collected in the unpublished chapbooks Ann prepared and, perhaps, submitted to publishers. They appear here within each section alphabetically by title. When dates are available, I have included them.

The sections are divided by subject.

A. About her time in Aleppo.
B. About Syria after she departed in 1998.
C. Concerning her travels in the wider Mediterranean region.

I have merely collected these poems, having corrected a small number of apparent errors, usually typographical. I have collected all I was able to find in the Ann Struthers Papers in Coe's Stewart Memorial Library, making no judgments about their quality or completeness. My main effort was to be comprehensive, though of course, I may have made errors and missed some items.

Part A
Ann Struthers in Aleppo.

Baron Hotel Bar, Aleppo, Syria
for David Ard and Marilyn Lechty

The Baron Hotel where Agatha Christie wrote
Death in the Afternoon while her husband directed
the dig at Tell Brak is still half Ottoman,
half Europe. In the cocktail lounge: tall French windows
shuttered against the afternoon sun,
wine-colored leather sofas and club chairs,
brass rail at the mahogany bar.
The walnut shelves hold Johnny Walker,
Black and Red, Cutty Sark, Gordon's,
and Smirnoff, left over from the Russians,
lately departed. We hear soldiers, country unknown,
in the dining room laugh over their Turkish coffee.
In the sitting room across the hall
behind glass is the register signed by T.E. Lawrence.
Now the waiter cashes traveler's checks, surreptitiously,
mixes gin and tonic for us the way Agatha ordered it
At the next table young Italian archeologists
drink wine from dark green bottles,
talk about the library they're uncovering,
clay tablets 4000 years old.
Meanwhile the hot, white sun pushes
slits of light slowly across the room.
We lean back easy, as if we had been here before.
Faintly and far away we hear the roister
of Alexander's army in the narrow streets,
the curses of Marco Polo's Chinese camel herders,
the jingle of camel bells as the mean-hearted beasts
twist their necks and spit. Then the dark clank
of crusaders' armor, the wild shouts of Tamerlane's
horsemen whooping out of Asia.

Was it only the wind? traffic's rush? street vendors' cries?
Agatha's pale ghost dances in the dust motes,
but she doesn't tell us anything.

Spring 2007

Basil Al-Assad
1970-1994
Son of President Hafez Al-Assad

Narrow mountain road, fast Ferrari,
Bony hand on the bloody engine.

Banners with Basil's pictures float
all over Damascus, appear on signs
pasted to walls. Arabic calligraphy
with its mysterious dancing script,
wishes blessings upon Basil in heaven,
with prayers for his father's grief.
Allah, the Compassionate, the Comforter,
knows his sorrow. The city mourns,
the country mourns the young man trained
to take over his father's office.

The President lives with his loss,
so heavy he thinks each morning
that he cannot lift it.

Bedouin

Seven enormous black-topped
Bedouin tents pitched in the desert.
Men and children herding goats and sheep
who munch tough shrubs, spiny grasses.
Beside the camp, two enormous army trucks,
left from the British in World War II.
On each fender their trucks wear
an ostrich plume because the camels
wore them on their harness, just above
the eyes.

No more camels; camel men, the elite class,
are displaced by technology. Like the others
they now herd lower animals, still
dreaming of the swaying journey,
twenty-eight days from Yemen
to Cairo where they first heard
the electronic call to prayer
from the minarets, a modern miracle.

Boundaries

For him the borders are open gates.
No exit permits demanded, no passports required,
no baksheesh.

For her the boundaries are like nooses.
Uniformed officials, their chests covered with
medals
scowl over her documents. The highway is
barricaded,
bridges washed out, closed because of bandits.
Lakes and rivers disappear, oceans recede.
Desert increases; the trees of the forest converge,
cover the footpaths; their branches hide sunlight.

Men and women live in different countries,
speak different languages.
Sometimes they reach across the lines on the
maps,
their fingers touching, their lips, their bodies
becoming
one sweet geography. But after waking they must
return
to the old establishment: moats, guards, concertina
wire
between them.

Note
Typescript dated 9/19/2004.

Butcher Shop in Al Jedaya

In the butcher shop
smoked tongues laced together on strings
hang like deflated brown balloons;
garlands of sausages festoon
the dusty window; sheep's' fatty tails,
denuded, stacked like flat, white paddles;
red and gristle-blue carcasses
suspended from iron hooks,
not much different from the figures
dangling from the scaffold in Hanging Square.

Carved in Stone

T.E. Lawrence, National Portrait Gallery, London

We look at Lawrence, carved in stone — he lies as if on his tomb,
like kings of old, his effigy on the coffin's lid,
a kaffiah above his very British face, Arab robes,
curved dagger stuck in his sash, sandals on his feet.
At his left shoulder, a pile of books
for the Oxford scholar.

He did not have enough time
to teach his Arab armies parliamentary procedure
in Damascus, after they defeated the Turks.
They abandoned governing, went home to their flocks,
their camel races, their wives, as Lloyd George
and General Allenby knew they would,
and the British and French carved up
the Middle East to suit themselves, and put a knife
in Lawrence's plans. Now the portrait of Allenby,
who ran the Egypt Station and despised Lawrence,
hangs just above the statue.
"Do you think the government planned this for irony?"
Barbara asks. "No," I tell her, "no, they think they
were right." Lawrence does not move an inch,
does not wiggle his big stone toe.

c. 2013

Crac des Chevaliers
Syria

Thirteen towers.
A moat chipped out of rock;
inside the first battlement's wall
two stone lions over a doorway
facing each other, sculpted
for Richard the Lion Heart.
Slits for the archers, catapults for lobbing
stones into an advancing army, platforms
for pouring down the boiling oil, and a chapel
where trefoil arches support faded red pillars.
In the kitchen, terra cotta jars big enough
to hide ali-Baba, enormous beehive ovens,
and a dark, deep, interior well.

I look through the needle's eye
at the only pass through the Anti-Lebanon Mountains
for 150 kilometers, the valley of the Nahr
on the west, the Orentes plain on the east.

Oh, my knight errant, if you had passed this way,
my spies would have spotted you, my armored soldiers
would have captured you, brought you
across the drawbridge under the teeth
of the iron gate, up the corridor
beside the mews for 500 horses,
into the banquet hall near the ramparts.
And you would have been in my power.
But you chose a different route,
sailed in a ship for Rhodes, for Cyprus,
and I do not know where you're going.

c. 2013

German Jazz

German jazz band plays in the ancient citadel,
the night fine and warm in Aleppo, Syria,
but Germans, you don't know jazz --
only its glittering wrapper. You play it well,
but you don't *feel* the gospel's sweet chariot, the
blues lament.
Oh, you didn't know, nobody knows the trouble,
come again
hard times, knocking. You didn't know
dancing in the jukes with Zora Neale Hurston,
the Harlem rent party with Fats Waller
playing stride piano. You have to know Jimmy
crack corn
and I don't care, I don't care. You blew the top of
the note,
its shell, but you never opened the box
because I got shoes and you got shoes
and they're dancing shoes, gonna dance all night,
gonna dance all day, and "Red Hot Mamma" and
"Pappa's Got the Blues,"
Oh, A Train, you didn't stop at this ruined castle,
didn't slow down for the Crusaders, the Abbasids,
the Turks in their turbans. Oh, Germans,
it's longing for what is always lost
and moonshine liquor and a banjo picker.
You almost understood it, but you didn't ache for it,
believe in it as if your life depended on it, as if
the only bread you'd ever eat and the only liquor
you'd ever drink was in "Ain't Misbehavin"
and "Dippermouth Blues."

Getting Around Damascus During the Eid

Past the 2,000-year-old wall,
now part of the church of St. Paul,
brown-robed village men tramp along,
herding their sheep. They'll camp
along some main road to sell the shaggy black
and brown animals for the feast of the Eid,
the holiday commemorating Abraham's sparing
Ishmael
and sacrificing a ram instead.

Whole families go out to visit.
Grandmother, Grandfather,
black-robed mother, aunts, uncles
and children of all sizes squeeze
into the gaily painted wagons pulled by motor
scooters,
some with the live sheep for their dinner
among them.

The great, crowded busses, metallic maroon, silver,
indigo, with enormous sprays of flowers
painted on their bulging sides,
play their clarion horns with three notes,
the finest ones festooned with Christmas tree lights
around the windshields.

The trucks, green, red, yellow, decorated with
patterns
as ancient as Jacob, geometric bars and borders
of bright blue or gold, wear on each fender,
ostrich feathers, traditional decoration
for camel harness, which whip in the rush
of the wind from the traffic.

The donkey carts amble along, too.
But I ache from displacement —
to go back so far in time to the ancient places,
a wrench, a physical tugging, as if I had been drug
through the keyhole backwards away from the
North's
unnatural snow, pulled into the bright sunshine,
into the heat of the desert. Like birth,
I'm a newborn gazing at everything. Eyes wide
for this old world, unsure if it's real.

The Gods Grow Old

In the Palmyra Museum, a black basalt statue
of Ba'al, god of the Chaldeans,*
whose followers persecuted the children
of Israel, the Lydians, the Mideans,
the Syrians, everyone in the way.

Here, sanitized by archeology, you stand
eight feet tall, your feet plinths,
ankles like palm trunks, eyelids white,
pupils pale, but your stare has lost
its terror. I'm not afraid,
old god from Shinar. I won't parade you
through the streets on your feast
of sacrifice by burning fruits
and long-haired sheep. No, I have
my own sacrifices, I, a repentant sinner.

Still, I see you're alone, neglected, you
the greatest of gods in your day, and I,
once electric with the juice of youth,
discover how all power fades away.

Note
Chaldeans: The typescript reads "Chileans."

The Harvest in Syria

Crossing the field, the harvesters,
both men and women, bend,
grasp a handful of stalks,
SWISH, sickle flashes,
barley falls. Children follow,
pick up grain; tie it with straws
into bundles. The bundles ride
on the stubble, seed heads
dry in the hot sun. Later
the women tuck the bundles into huge bags,
the size of featherbeds;
men toss them onto trucks, take them
to the roadside threshing machine,
easier than beating the grain
on the threshing floor with flails
as their fathers did.

Our bus of visiting American professors stops
to watch. The harvesters motion to us
to join them. The man on top of the truck
waves his water bottle, offering to share
in a desert country. The children
bring the sheep into the cleared field
to glean, laughing and shouting.

Harvesting Coriander Seeds in Syria

Under the desert sun, a girl strips stems,
beats the straw on the threshing ground.
She bends, scoops, fills her large, round sieve,
large as the circle her arms make.
She rises, lifts, tambourines it,
tilts it so the seeds almost, but not quite
fall out, turns, shakes it to give
the chaff to the wind.

It is a shame on the family if a girl
falls in love before marriage, but she dances
back and forth, dips, hesitates, shuffles,
skips, her dress a blue blur. The wind,
her invisible partner, presses against her,
but no one can hear the name of the boy
she sings silently. The white desert heat
sends the ripe coriander scent, sweet
as untold love, sifting over Syria.

The Hawk Looks Down

Soaring updrafts, watching little farms, the hawk
circles, looks down with his hawk eyes.
Below, Kurdish Syria crawls with soldiers,
strangers, Turks, who crossed the border,
sent by Turkey's government to appropriate Syria,
confiscate, appropriate every hectare, defeat the
Kurds.

Kurds who battled ISIS, won hand-to-hand at
Raqqa. Kurds
here built a new civilization, a society of hawks
among the conservative sparrows of Syria,
A new government, army, with women who have
the eye
of freedom. These women destroyed all the old
borders,
became mayors, council members, commanders,
good soldiers

in a society that kept women sequestered. Never
before soldiers
or anything except wife and mother. It's new for
Kurds
too, men surprised that women so easily cross the
border
to real personhood, revel in it, and become hawks
for the new freedoms. They keep the prize in their
eyes,
bring a revolution across the Middle East beginning
in Syria.

Turkey's troops see the countryside in Northern
Syria,

mostly the same as home. They're sweet country
boys, soldiers
who thought the army would be a great adventures.
Their eyes
see country people much like their own families,
like the Kurds
who till the land, pray for rain from same dry clouds,
hawk
their vegetables in same open-air markets, weave
strong borders

on red and green carpets, same hand looms,
attention to sturdy borders.
Centuries ago Kurds brought from Medea to guard
a king of Syria.
They have never forgotten how to fight, fiercer than
hawks.
Their women just as brave — why not? the stock of
warrior Kurds
Meticulous, dependable, in all they do, good
soldiers.
Now so many bloody bodies, even hawk can't bear
what his eye

sees. In the U.S., a money-grubbing president can't
afford the eyes
of the Kurds, the arms of Kurds in Syria; their little
border
makes him no money. Suffering not his doesn't
count. Kurds
are nothing, the drought, the river dead, nothing in
Syria
matters to him a world away. A million refugees
harried by soldiers
are half children, their mothers, mostly war widows,
hungry as hawks.

Some Kurds have fled five times, shoes worn out,
dry eyes
from all the tears they've shed, borders crossed.
The hawks
above Syria weep for them, and so do many young
Turkish soldiers.

Note
Probably 2019 or later.

The Hawk Looks Down [Another version]

Warrior Hawk Women

Faceless desert at the busy border,
Soaring updrafts, watching little farms, the hawk
circles, looks down with his hawk eyes.
Below, Kurdish Syria crawls with Turkish soldiers,
sent by their government to appropriate Syria,
confiscate every meter possible, defeat the Kurds,

who fought hand-to-hand, won at Raqqa. Kurds
here built a new civilization, a society of hawks
among the conservative sparrows of Syria,
a new government, army with women who have the
eye
of freedom. Women become mayors of towns,
border
guards, even commanders, the most reliable
soldiers.

In a society that keeps women sequestered. Never
soldiers
or anything except wife and mother. It's new for
Kurds,
too, men shocked that women so easily cross the
border
to real personhood, revel in it, and become hawks
for the new freedoms. They keep the prize in their
eyes,
see a revolution across the Middle East beginning
in Syria.

The Turkish troops see the countryside in Northern
Syria
mostly the same as home. They're sweet country
boys, soldiers
who thought the army would be a great adventure.
Their eyes
see country people much like their families, Kurds
who till the land, pray for rain from the same
drought, hawk
their vegetables in the same kind of market, weave
a strong border

on red and green striped carpets; their families,
weavers of borders,
too. Centuries ago, Kurds brought to guard the king
of Syria.
They have never forgotten how to fight, fiercer than
hawks,
the women just as brave — the stock of warrior
Kurds.
Now so many bloody bodies, even hawk can't bear
what his eye

sees. In the U.S. a money-grubbing president can't
afford the eyes
of the Kurds, the arms of Kurds in Syria; their little
border

makes him no money. Suffering not his, doesn't
count. Kurds
are nothing, the drought, river dead, nothing in
Syria
matters to him a world away. Refugees, harried by
worried soldiers.
are half children, their mothers, mostly war widows,
hungry as hawks.

Some Kurds fled five times, shoes worn out, dry
eyes
from all the tears they've shed, borders crossed.
The hawks
above Syria weep for them, and so do some of the
young Turkish soldiers.

Ishtar Gate of Babylon

Maybe you approached the gates
along the magnificent pathway,
yellow sand raked in fan patterns,
between walls of blue glazed bricks, and here and
there
golden bricks with bas relief lions, just to let you
know
that this is the King's Way. You were
a merchant with a string of camels
come from the East with silks
and trinkets carved from ivory for ladies.

Or you were a lady sent
in a covered tent aboard a white camel
for the king's harem. You peeked
through the curtains and saw that you were
approaching the richest city in the world.
and you shivered, not knowing if the king
would be pleased with you — if he would be brutal
or kind.

Or you were a diplomat, your head haughty,
dressed in rich robes, rehearsing the important
messages
that you had memorized — bringing presents of
gold plates
and silver ewers, and a little mechanical squirrel
in a cage that ate a nut again and again when the
spring was wound.

Or maybe you never saw these gates before
because you are a gawking tourist in the Berlin
museum
in 2009 who will soon move on to the red Aleppo
room
its walls covered with small paintings after the
gospel stories
which you like better than the fearsome dragons
and sacred bulls
in the procession to the god, Marduk, along the
King's Way,
although the lions are lovely.

Blue glazed bricks, as blue as the polished sky
above Babylon, the richest, most important, most
feared city
in the world that everyone knew would last forever.

1/21/2011

Jewelry Souk in Damascus

Lady who wore this silver necklace,
six registers of tiny, handmade beads,
separated by seven dividers,
at the bottom, thirteen medallions,
all this strung on a braided cord
not new, your sweat, perfumed
with frankincense still on it.
Who are you? Why did you sell?

Did your family fall on hard times,
sheep dying and camels bloated?
Was it drought in the desert?
a raid by another tribe?

Or maybe you are dead and the other wives
sold all your things, even this necklace
which I'll wear to remember one
whom I only imagine:
you milking your goat, squatting on one leg,
holding the bowl beneath the swollen teats,
your other leg extended, securing the goat's ankle
between your first two toes.

Behind you I see swagged tops of tents
you loomed from black goat hair,
loose weave allowing desert air
to circulate, and when it rains,
closes up like an angry mouth,
and all around the stubborn brush
of the desert, thorny, like your life,
which must have meant selling your necklace.

19 September 2005

Mirage

Old sheep dog, I'm surprised to see you
in the Temple of Ba'al in this desert oasis,
too hot in your curly grey-black fur, white vest,
hair over your round brown eyes,
resting in the shade on the steps
of the high altar where many abominations
and tortures were practiced,
panting because you're my old dog,
and dead two years.
I think you are cleansing and purifying
this bloody place with your goodness and
innocence.
With you, two Brits, elderly frail sticks.
They speak to me in soft angel voices,
leaning against the stones so I cannot see their
backs
where their wings are folded.

21 January 2005

Mirage [Another version]

Cleansing the Monuments
Palmyra, Syria

In the Temple of Ba'al at this desert oasis,
Old sheep dog, you're panting, too hot
In your curly gray-black fur, white vest,
Resting in the shade on the high steps
Of the main altar where many abominations
And tortures were practiced. I'm surprised to see
you
Because you're my dog and dead two years.

You look at me as if to say that you're cleansing
And purifying this place of horror with your
goodness
And innocence. With you, two Brits, elderly frail
sticks.

They speak to me in soft angel voices,
Leaning against the stones so I can't see their
backs
Where their wings are folded!

Movers and Shakers in Heaven Near Damascus

There's Gertrude Bell, ivory cigarette holder;
Appleby sulks into a corner. He doesn't like us.
(Principal of ICARDA School in Aleppo
didn't like us either); Kuwaiti Minister of Petroleum
and his wife beside two solid silver chairs,
silver table draped with a string of 100 lapis prayer
beads
the size of walnuts — (We were told, you can't
take it with you,
but they managed to smuggle it in);

fat, bleached-blond American woman with
wizened Ali,
former porter at the Moon Valley Hotel at Petra
(She says, "We jet off to Paris during Ramadan");
Jack Philby walks in the garden "To sight a new
Arabian bird —
(He'll name it for a woman his wife doesn't know.)
University of Aleppo's Dean warns faculty that I'm
CIA,
not to attend my party; Everybody knows the CIA
always employs old lady English teachers.

Lawrence beside Feisal, not yet a king, identical
white silk robes
and white keffiahs held in place with gold agals.
Sir Percy Cox sends Lawrence back to quarters,
ordered into his uniform. Lawrence smirks.
He speaks seven Arabic dialects.
(He doesn't say what he thinks of the Egypt
Command.)
They're all there, still there,
their shades wade through ISIS smoke.
Seven years ago at Wadi Rum we watched
the sunset mist, copper-colored clouds breaking up.
We didn't know how fractious the air,
how it would shatter into flaming chards
and the known world beheaded and burned alive.

Music Store in Aleppo

Habibi

Song of one word
to drive you crazy
to drive you into frenzy
of hope and desire
when the music store's amplifiers
blare the song out onto the sidewalk
where the boys loiter dancing
singing along playing their imaginary guitars
their hands strumming just below their belts
the girls two by two strolling past
pretending not to notice all the handsome young
men
pretending they do not hear all the young men
singing *habibi*
*habib*i to them to them just them
just now just this minute oh my beloved ha*bibi*
longing
violins saxophones groan
drums throb with everything they are denied
everything they dream
(that will never be) they ache to believe
///hope which is almost believing
though (suspicion) floats on the chorus

Some of the girls sing softly *Habibi habibi*
they go home and cry
into their impossible beloved pillows
some of the boys go home
and beat their impossible soft pillows
habibi habibi habibi.

Near the Turkish Border

No moon, no lights. Shepherd driving his sheep
on the shoulder. Their black faces,
black legs, lost in the dark. Only their white bodies
drifting like clouds of ghosts,
like the souls of all the old conquerors
along the road to Antioch and Iskandaroon

4 February 2005

One Evening in Aleppo

This evening in Aleppo while the others
go to dinner, I open the French doors
to the balcony, lean against the balustrade,
let the warm wind blow lightly,
lifting the day's heat, lifting the curtains.
Below is the square with its massive Russian
Laborers
sculpture, its fountains splashing in Arabic,
families strolling on the esplanade.
Then the electronic call to sunset prayer.
Strollers stroll on, fountains
never miss a jet, but two workmen
in the grey uniforms of the poor
pull their prayer stones from their pockets,
kneel, and place their heads reverently on them
while the imam calls the faithful,
of which these two are the only ones,
only these two and I, who remain silent
at the railing, grateful for this ancient city,
for the holy and the unholy, glad to be alive,
and here* just once, a drop of water falling.

Note

*Perhaps intended "hear"?

Proper and Acceptable

On Friday the bus purrs toward Damascus
its steel chrysalis bulging with a cacophony
of whines and thumps, "*Habbebe, Habbebe,
Habbebe,"*
beloved, beloved, beloved, blaring from the radio.
We pass village markets,
the bright tables of cheap shirts and pants,
the nylon scarves of many colors, plastic shoes,
past pyramids of tomatoes and peaches,
plumes of spinach and lettuce, skyscrapers of soap
made from olive oil and bay leaf, trays of
pistachios,
baskets of herbs and spices….

Always beside the road there is the barber,
his shears in hand, a kitchen chair
for his customers, a mirror propped
on a stool or held by a small boy —
and the village men are handsome,
the village men are vain.

Their wives wear the black abayah,
shapeless down to the ankles,
the hijab covering their hair; some wear
a black veil over their entire face,
and one beside me on the bus
wears black gloves, too. A hole shows
her little finger nail, and she keeps her hand
hidden, because she is ashamed, ashamed.

c. 2013

Rooftop People in Damascus

Helicopter whirr
of pigeons coming to the duplicitous lure
of corn spread on the flat rooftop.
White female on a string, her soft coos,
parading her silky feathers.
Males strutting like minor attendants
of a minor potentate.
Rooftop people in a position to look down upon
their neighbor's shade-less windows.

They see what society says cannot be seen:*
the girl dressing, her breasts
as soft and white as the pigeons,
lovers' forbidden positions
slick with sweat, their tunics on the floor,
hear their forbidden cries, what should be hidden,
forbidden

Having seen what cannot be seen
they cannot speak what they know,
is *harum*. No court can take their testimony,
tainted by their rooftop pigeon lives.

The pigeons see everything, tell everything.
The rooftop people hold them,
careful of all those delicate secrets
stored inside the silky feathers.

Note
*In the typescript, this line is:
They see what society says they cannot be seen:….

Ruins at Cyrrhus

Take me to the ruins at Cyrrhus
where Linda drove over the lintel
of the Roman house deep in debris,
covered by puddles she saw too late,
its door closed to us forever.

Take me to the coins
ancient or recently manufactured
and buried to grow patina
for the ragamuffins to hawk.

They must be born from the stones
of every ruined garrison village.

Take me to St. Simeon
where the benighted saint
perched on a pillar to prove
his devotion to God

The pilgrims, some hungry
for true devotion,
some proud to flaunt their money,
some searching for home

Take me to love and not love,
those twins of the heart,
right ventricle, left ventricle,
same blood pulsing through both.

Take me to the Lost Ark of the Covenant,
to Shangri La,
to the Treasure of the Sierra Madre,
to the old world and the new, which is no better.

Take me out of myself
Take me to your garden at Latakia
where we will sit at the table
that was once the acanthus leaf capital
of the broken pillar still lying there,
and we will eat flat bread, yogurt, and olives
and watch the sea coming in steady
and peaceful

Sand Storm Out of Egypt
Aleppo, Syria

No Cairo kitten, it roared out of Africa,
twirled across the Mediterranean Sea,
it's great maw open, hungry, yellow
lion beastly, ready to lick
a city or a country.
A warning spate of sand
hurled against the garden wall. I grabbed the
washing
before it ripped and sailed off to Saudi.
I had not believed the smashing they told me it
could do.
But here it was, bellowing classic Arabic.

Then it unraveled, left
before I could completely curse it,
leaving its calling card beneath my fastened
windows,
its hieroglyphics painted on the floor.

Secrets in an Arab Town

Whir of feathers
whish through white and gray wings,
brisk rustle of taffeta
pigeons circle home near dusk,
alight near huts on flat rooftops
in the Old City
among illegal antenna and disks.

The keeper spreads cracked com
for his regulars who bring
a new brown female along
tonight. He gently strokes the birds
into illegal cages.
The rooftop dwellers illegal, too,
outside the law for generations—
their word no good in court;
they're not allowed to swear,
having seen through their neighbors'
uncurtained windows, what they should not see,
know part of what only God knows,
so secret even the saints would not tell it.

Spy Business

My business is spy business, but no one suspects
me,
an elderly academic, Iowa honest
and innocent as the prairie skies
in my polyester pants suit. I carry
an oversize purse from Walmart which holds
my plastic rain bonnet, my Elvis Presley key-chain
and pictures of my grandchildren.
I wear tennis shoes because I have a bad back
and cat-eye sun glasses from the fifties.
I read Danielle Steel novels on the planes
that shuttle me from world hot spot to hot spot,
I drink tea with milk in all the bars
where secrets are told and sold:
Those who sell drugs for guns,
who assassinate their rivals and blame their
enemies,
I write it down.
Who sell anthrax bacteria for big profits,
and boast of their bottom line.
I write it down.
Who order prisoners shot,
their daughters raped,
I write it down.
Who teach the building of bombs,
who promise seven virgins in heaven
to suicide bombers.
I write it down.
Who send children
ahead of their army across the mine fields.
I write it down.
Who order bulldozers to fill in a trench
of living soldiers trying to surrender.
I write it down.
I write it down.

I present my reports
to my superior.
And God is not pleased.

22 March 2006

Stiff Neck

I was complete and whole when
the cab driving me into Damascus
from the airport passed row upon row of
apartments,
so many balconies hung with black and white
strands —
of what? I was too jet-lagged to wonder.

In the Al-Hussain Hotel, lying on the bed,
flat as a board and not as soft,
the pillow beneath my head, was a rock.
I'm sure it was a rock.
I dreamed of Jacob who had a stone
for a pillow and who dreamed
he wrestled an angel. And thereafter
he walked lame. I think it was this
very same pillow, now an artifact
in my room, 319.

Later I found out
the black and white strands were local
sheep's' wool, and housewives and hotel maids
emptied out mattresses and pillows
every spring, washed it, dried it in the desert sun,
and then jammed it again into mattress covers
and pillows, pushing and pummeling
the tough fibers into stone-like consistency
with a special, bat-like stomper.

For days now I have a crick in my neck,
eased if I carry it tilted toward my left shoulder,
and when I'm dancing, no one notices my limp.

Suspicion

The plainclothes police saunter by my flat.
Cat turns up her nose. Everyone recognizes
cockroaches.

The Mukhabarat, the mangy dogs of Syria, watch
the police.
At night -- horrific cries from their jail.

Air Force Intelligence follows the Mukhabarat
in air-conditioned Mercedes. They don't stop.

Mosquitoes, moths, silverfish. Informers in my
classes
at the University. I tell the students that Hemingway

utilized T. E. Lawrence as a model for Robert
Jordan.
Students' history books says Lawrence sold out the
Arabs.

I tell them about primary research and secondary.
Is Military Intelligence listening? Office secretary
says

rats live in Sayid Hall, our building. Locked in
one night, I imagine I hear them until the guard
frees me.

The graying president of the Student Ba'ath Party
visits my office frequently, wants to marry an
American.

His shirt should read: REPTILE. He's the one who
tore
up the petition the women students signed for clean
bathrooms.

Internal Security is watching the National Security
Bureau,
and they all have double agents in the other
bureaus.

Crows, vultures, civet cats, skunks, werewolves.
I may turn into a spider or a fly on the bugged
ceiling.

Suspicion is the father beast of suspicion, its
grandfather
and all its relatives, all of them eating now at this
table.

Syrian Picnic

The Syrians know how to provision a picnic —
they bring their carpets, tables, plastic chairs,
the baby's high chair, cooking pans
stirring spoons, tea kettle, and a bottle of mazoot
with a ring on top for cooking. They pile all this
into the back of a pickup with the women and
children,
aunts, uncles, cousins, grandmothers and
grandfathers
with their canes. They unload beside the river
or among the elegant ruins at Apenea where I am
sitting
on a broken round of Roman-carved pillar,
eating my sandwich and apple, having never before
realized
my poverty of picnics.

In July when their crowded flats bake in the desert
heat,
the poor of the city sardine themselves into a
service
and ride out to the ring highway
and set up their picnics in the median. They stay
till midnight or later while the heat of the day rises
higher than the minarets, and finally a small breeze
from the east dances the women's long black
abayas.

Note
October 2004 (originally "Picnic Provisions")

Two Who Need Each Other

In Petra's village a woman in black
buys a bag of hay,
stuffs it into
a pearlescent plastic bag and lugs
it on the zigzag path up the mountain,
last rays of sun flashing from it.

At the top a horse silhouetted
against the dusky sky
prances on the ridge.

You are the woman
carrying the burdens of the day,

and he is the beautiful creature
who will eat and dance away
in the dark that hides almost everything.

c. 2017

Waterwheels at Hama, Syria

The waterwheels at Hama lift and turn
their wooden paddles, wooden gears and groan
like giants in great pain. Their burden churns
through old chutes the engineering Romans

built to irrigate the valley's barley,
wheat. Roman cruelty permeated
water, soil, and air, their brutal army
crucified and killed, thus satiated

their bloody emperors.
New tyrants come,
drink from the same cup. Grand Palace Hotel
is built upon the houses and the bones
of women, children bombed where the Muslim
Brotherhood's assassins hid. Who can tell
how many lie in blasted rubble tombs?

White Camel and Ruins at Palmyra After the Sublime

White she-camel with silver lip,
long curled lashes hide a murderous eye.
She races on cushioned hooves
toward the Euphrates. My saddle bags
striped with red and orange,
woven with black chevrons
studded with white wool dots; saddle blankets
tassled
in blue and purple; reins
and saddle ornamented with silver.
Oh, Lawrence, I have left Palmyra,
am speeding north toward the country
of the Kurds, the blue Turkish mountains in the
distance.

This is the route Zenobia rode,
trying to reach the generals of Mesopotamia
for help, her soldiers encircled
by the Romans. She could see
the river, a boat on the shore,
She leapt down, ran toward the water,
soldiers gaining; they catch her,
transport her to Rome in golden chains.
Back in the oasis they throttle the old men,
kill the women and children,
behead Longinus, her Greek advisor.

Zenobia's buttery gold limestone pillars,
1500 of them marching down the grand colonnade,
roofed over and cool even in the desert heat;
at the end of the triumphal way, the temple to
Samas,
a mile in circumference,
— its altar surrounded by 400 copper-clad
columns,
all of this broken now and ruined,
except the white camel,
the sun bronzing the sky, polishing the sands,
and the rush of hot winds off the desert.

Part B.
About Syria after Ann Struthers departed in 1998.

Beach Club

These days on the shiny beach:
little girls assiduous with shovels and sand pails,
little boys run into the surf,
waves chase them back licking their heels.
Tanned women stretch on luxurious sand,
"My dear, she lives in a hovel.
Did I tell you...."
Old ocean laps up the story.

Sing me the last songs of those who won't come back
from the desert sands, the enclaves
of the most righteous in the holy city
beside the martyr's tomb where the great wheels
of war grind slowly.

Tide surges in, washes out.
North Shore light
revolves with its single eye
in the middle of its head—
it stands on the rocks we can see
and those we can't.

A Broad Dish of Syrian Larks

Bayard Taylor, quarantined in "Beyroot" on April 17, 1852 —
hotel agents send beds, tables, kitchen provisions for your servants
and soon you dine on "Cotelettes and a broad dish of Syrian larks,"

You look out at the city silhouetted against mulberry groves,
feel a little guilty for so many songs gone down your throat.
After the Civil War I strolled on the Corniche while sun set over the bay,

rubble of the Green Line behind me, mortar holes like ragged black eyes.
You ride horseback down the coast to Jerusalem. Nineteen sects compete
for the holy sites; the Greek Orthodox stole the silver star

the Church of Rome erected at Bethlehem, but are forced
to return it. The city is Turk-occupied; quarreling Christians
embarrass you. Today I think of Arab and Jewish children, the killings,

bombings, homes pulled down, olive groves destroyed, Oh, holy mother,
holy father, this is surely a delusion; this cannot happen in the Holy Land.
But it is not a delusion. Later, you cross mountains, ride down

into Damascus "sink into a sea of olive, pomegranate, orange, plum,
and apricot trees." My Damascus plane flew far to the east,
so it could come into the airport in the sights of the anti-aircraft guns

cemented into bunkers on the bare hills in case I was the enemy.
You buy a short sword in the market, its point obviously snapped off
and reworked, blue Damascus steel in a jeweled scabbard with a crimson cord.

Souks still sell tent straps, lambskin lined cloaks,
black and white checked
kaffiahs, silver hand-made beads. Merchant insists,
"This necklace belonged
to the sheik's wife." I wonder how he got it away
from her. For $25 I buy it.

You smoke hashish and write "…in the character of
this paradise
…in the gorgeous fancies of The Arabian Nights, in
the glow and luxury
of all Oriental poetry, I now recognize …the agency
of hasheesh."

From my flat I view graceful minarets of the newest
mosque, its amplifiers
for prayers the largest in the city, built, the
neighbors say, with money
from transporting Afghan and Pakistan hash across
Syria to the West.

You ride north to Aleppo, Shabba Haleb (white
milk). The khans are full.
Fairytale-like, a servant bids you come to a house
prepared for you.
I remember Ramon and Ahmal's in the Old City,
You must have

walked past its walled garden. They're old
Christians,
and inside — a terrace where the archbishop
plucks grapes from the trellis.
You push on, although it's midsummer, hot, and
gadflies bite your horses

bloody, mobs of mosquitoes attack you at night —
cities along Turkey's coast
are malarial, but you are healthy, although you
drink from brackish wells
At Skandaroon you find a gray tower, "Jonah's
Pillar." You're skeptical,

write that it's the third place along this coast where
Jonah was vomited up.
(West of Damascus they show me the grave where
Cain buried Abel.)
You meet a pilgrim to the Dervishes' founder's
tomb, Hazret Mavlanah,
who gives you traveling tips: "Always pronounce
the name of Allah
when your horse stumbles or when you see a man
in danger of his life
as the word has saving power…." During the Eid
after Ramadan

you remark the lamps lighted on the minarets'
balconies.
Today pale green spotlights pick out the narrow
shafts of white stone.
I wish I could have seen the lanterns flickering,
heard
the unamplified voice of the muezzin chanting his
prayers.
You say farewell to "the gay gardens, spicy
bazaars, to the plash of fountains
and the gleam of moon-tipped minarets," but
become homesick in rainy England

for sunshine, so you set out for Spain, China, Loo
Choo, and Japan.
I fly to Minneapolis, drive south to green Iowa,
through forests of corn,
but I am sick for palm trees, for long velvet
evenings at the story-teller's café,

for the life mysterious, Oriental. I dream of the
battlements
of ghostly castles and hear the wind soughing
through the vanished
Cedars of Lebanon where the murdered larks still sing.

2 July 2004

After the Quarrels of Mortars and Machine Guns

After the quarrels of bombs and mortars,
her stone house in Aleppo
folded like a tent.

Worn cobbles, haunts of the wise men's camels
tethered in the old khans, stripped in *ablaq*
that withstood the earthquake; old tyrants in new clothes,
and the patient people, living behind the walls,
gossiping and dancing to the drum, their laughter
stronger than police and oppression. She did not accept;
she lived upon refusal, loving the wild iris blooming on the hill,
the Bedouins who knew no writing, no books,
the autumn rains, the winter's winds, women in dark cloaks,
their children scurrying like rabbits, loving the grand vista
from San Simon across the country to the land of the Kurds,
loving the red and green carpets they wove;
standing beside the pillar of the saint, and finding
it impossible to love him who would not allow any woman to look
on him, not even his mother; loving the students who hid behind a pillar
for the touch of a hand, a surreptitious kiss so slight it might not have been a kiss;
temples of the ancient gods, with their giant stone footprints;
first mosque in Syria where Mohammed's slipper indented the granite,
Roman dromedary arched bridges, small cisterns every twelve miles,
St. Luke's portrait of the Virgin that protected
Crusaders in battle in a land that conquered many of them;
pastel clay houses on the ridges of Ma'alula where the old people
still spoke the language of Jesus; cherry trees in the mountains
on the Eastern shore, oranges and grapefruit, blossoms in spring
sifting through the whole country — their perfume must have enchanted
those armored Franks from the cold north.

After time's wheels rolled across the *Jebels* still mourning their cedars,
into the valleys, this is when the engines came,
and the flags, the great countries arming the innocents
who died for what they were told were great causes.

Aleppo Burning

UNESCO World Heritage Site: Al Medina Souks

After the long Euphrates trek from Ur
across deserts where the wild wind scallops
the sand, past the beehive houses, over
rivers, hills, to this market ground, *Halep*,

white for the limestone houses, white for milk,
the old market place, here Abraham stops
to milk his cow. Listen, the oud's sweet lilt
still plays empty spaces. Little shops:

today's pop music, sermons, funeral wails,
even tent straps, sheepskin coats, galibayas,
workers' cheap grey or banker's tailored — veils,
hejabs, scarves, and modest black abayahs,

erotic flowered bras, string bikini
underclothes, perfume, Yemen frankincense.
Nuts, seeds, spices — sweet olive oils, tahini,
cinnamon, nutmeg, cumin. Gold bracelets,

fat sheep tails, dewooled, hanging like ping pong
paddles at the butcher's. Black smoke churning
when rebels shelled this sacred ground where long
past Abraham rested. Now Aleppo's burning.

Note:
Struthers may have submitted a poem with this title to *Epoch* on 18 October 2007. However, this seems to come from after the Civil War began in 2011. She next submitted a poem with this title on 9 November 2012.

Breathe the Dust of the Dead

Note: *These appear to be three different texts found in a file Struthers named "Aleppo Dust." Whether she considered any to be a final version is not known. They are presented here as they appear in the file. Her submission records indicate that she may have written two different poems with similar titles between 2007 and 2020: "Dust of the Dead" and "We Breathe the Dust of the Dead."* Apparently none of these was published.

[Text One]

Aleppo lifted up, built
of white limestone threaded with iron oxide,
milk and gold in the desert sun —
corals, crinoids, spiral gastropods
compressed eons past in shallow margins
of the old Middle Sea.

Here Abraham's cattle drank
beside the river; obstreperous camels
of Silk Road caravans spit, defecated;
armies of Egyptians, Assyrians, Tartars, Turks,
Roman's Legions marched and swore.
Paul and Timothy
trudged the stone roads,
shook off the dust from their sandals.

Now dust, rebar, cement, stone, human flesh dust.
Aleppo of patriarchs, city of saints,
Country of ordinary mothers and fathers,
beautiful children
dust in their mouths, dust in their noses
dust in their dead eyes.

[Text Two]

In Syria, we breathe the dust of the dead.

Aleppo, built from compression pressure
mansions of brachiopods, trilobites,
towers of corals, crinoids, spiral gastropods,
layer weighing down on layer, on layer
at the shallow margins of the old Middle Sea
the sacred spires of Atlantis dissolved eons past
the waters clear green through its gates, its
windows.

[Text Three]

In Syria, We breathe the dust of the Dead

The oldest (still inhabited) city in the world?
Probably not, but perhaps equally so,
10,000 years, 9,000, old as Damascus,
old as Abraham herding his cattle, his people,
stopped to milk his cow, white milk, Halep,
city of limestone threaded with iron oxides
shining white and golden in the sunlight.
hooves, sandals, stir the trail dust,
from eons of shells, brachiopods, trilobites,
towers of corals, crinoids, spiral gastropods
weighed down, layer on layer, pressure,
eons and eons, weight on weights. Years in their
millions
Dissolved in it all, mysterious palaces
broken pillars, smashed perfume bottles of Atlantis.

Paul and Timothy,
trudging the Roman roads,
shook off the dust from their sandals
outside any town that would not listen to the story

Dust, dust, dust and rubble
Rubble in the streets, mountains and valleys
large stones, small stones, smooth and sharpened
by explosions
blocks of cement, large and small, ragged, jagged,
chunks, jagged of broken rebow* skeletons of
rebow

cement dust, stone dust,
clouds of dust, mountains of rubble
narrow way to Sisi House full of rubble
Armenian church damaged
the dust of the dead the city of Abraham, of the
saints, of the Armenians and Syriacs, of the of
the faithful Muslims
dust, all of it precious

Note
Probably Struthers meant to write "rebar?"

Cat Naps

Great gray ships steamed into Liverpool from
Egypt,
carrying tons of cat mummies,
pulverized and sold as fertilizer for the roses
of England: pearl-white Moonlight;
coral edged Escapade; blowsy pink Mary Rose;
Proud Titania; Mountbatten; Passion Park,
and the other reds, all these blessed by Bastet,
the cat goddess. Now Egypt in England,
the Island part of the Mainland.

Mummy wrappings used for paper making,
human mummy dust used to stop bleeding
of wounds, and English cats lay down
in the shade of roses made rich by Egypt,
dreaming of the days when they were gods.

13 September 2005

Flower Roads

Old friends from books,
who lost two countries,
gone down like the lighthouse at Alexandria,
lost the road of spring lilacs,
fields of blue iris on hillsides where squatters
live in the ruins, an old church, it's roof rotted
in 1487, its stones mined for shelter, blue tarps
for walls, yet a generous gift to watch
the evening sun gilding the stones.

Oh Exiles, sunk with the Colossus of Rhodes,
what is history
but a broken promise,
the refugee and the orphan,
the ache of our age?

Holy City of Jerusalem, of Gethsemane,
Holy mosque at Al Birwa beneath the olive trees,
Holy War spitting
Holy Broken Countries.
Oh, Mahmoud Darwish, Edward Said,
the world has lost too much.

Folk on the Shore

Shaking like dice in a cup.
Then water leaps out of the stone
and an island erupts from the sea.
Folk on the shore shade their eyes
that must have betrayed them.
Some fall on their knees to Allah;
some whisper to the old gods.
They send the women home.

They row out in their boats
of transience, climb the new born beach,
marvel at rubble and muck, row back
with oars of awe. Tomorrow the sea
will suck back its island just as it
will take all of them
when it's ready.

Ghosts of Aleppo

I know that I belong to the city of those who have no place.
Rumi

Two walls peeled away from my third floor flat,
a broken chair I found this morning,
my table still standing,
my cup of tea steady on it now,
the shelling, the bombing quiet at last.
I am looking out from the place where the walls used to be,
searching the rubbled *Shara Nile.* Walls of the Citadel,
gone, its Crusader ghosts,
gone, the last Jews who sold their Hebrew books
to the junk man and left everything,
gone, millions who left lugging their sorrows
like baggage, their backpacks of tears
to Sweden, Germany, to camps in Jordan,
camps already digging into permanent stone.
I am looking at the rubble of lives,
on the floor of the Aegean,
small bodies, drowned dreams.
I left you, Idlib and Homs, the Museum in Damascus
Euphrates border town where Jews, Christians,
secret Zoroastrians, Kurds, Ismalis, Sunnis and Shia'a
lived side by side, all giving, partaking
of the society, not perfectly, sheep not all pastured well,
but no one kept all the way outside, no one killing.
I left you all, now pieces of me broken in Toronto,
Athens, beautiful Vienna. Although I tell myself,
I am gone,
I am still sitting in a broken chair in a broken room
in a broken Aleppo, and below the broken walls
on the glacis of the Citadel, mint is again thrusting
its persistent leaves toward the sun!

Nothing keeps mint down, nothing kills mint. Not war, not beheadings.
Between broken stones
Mint says, Mint has had enough
of hate, too much of hate. Now is the time
for Mint of a New Day.

On the last floor of the last flat on the last street.
in Aleppo,
I am here.

I plant my chair

September 2017
Revised for *The End of the Day*.

Jonah Complains about God's Mercy
(the prophet is all too human)

On dry land, Jonah in the shade of vines
Grousing, pouting that Nineveh got off
Too free from all their sins and slipped the grind,
of just desserts — that God's stone mill is fraught

with retribution long delayed. He craved
a harsher script with punitive amends
Nothing big, a street upheaved, port incaved
a minor quake, a little sweet revenge

to prove him right and Nineveh in error.
Unfair, he was denied the honey taste
of vengeance — horror of those miscreants
struggling, learning the alphabet of terror,
and remorse as they turned in harried haste,
apologized and begged for one more chance.

Just War

War is not just
For grandmothers and grandfathers,
Their hair already silver. Their years
Should be spent in contentment, watching
The warm days of autumn fall
Like ripe fruit, watching the cat stretch,
And the grandchildren growing up.

War is not just
For children when the boy finds a ball
That's a hand grenade, or when playing tag,
She runs across the field where a land mine
Blows away her leg and blinds her.

War is not just
For women who give birth early.
Their babes suck hunger; mothers breathe despair.

War is not just for men,
Old and young, who have to leave their fields,
Their jobs and come home broken, destitute,
Carrying the skeletons of the dead
On their backs
For the rest of their lives.

War is not just for young girls
Who are raped, or desperate, paste on smiles,
Turn to the dirty streets in short skirts.

Tell me how just is war.

The Kurds' Olive Orchards at Ifrin

In harvest time the village school shuts down,
the farmers leave their fields, their wives leave looms.
Into the groves with baskets, entire town
starts work. Ten-year-old boys at last assume

importance, scramble up the trees and ride
the dangerous canopy, great steed —
a horse above their older brothers — slide
the olives off the stem, released like beads.

They used to sing a song thanksgiving for
the sun and rain, the harvest. Now the guns
that come across the border's open door
murder the trees and small boys having fun.

12 February 2018

Martyrs

If you hear voices speaking to you,
close your ears. Do not tell anyone.
Do not listen or look.
Walk with your eyes downcast
because the saints sometimes appear
on the mountain's side,
materialize between the apple trees,
especially, do not go into a cave. They love
grottoes.

They have given everything,
and they want all of you,
not one little finger bone left,
not one finger nail,
not one hair.
They don't promise you anything in return.
Only the glories of failure,
tears of neglect,
a blazing fire at the stake,
the arrows and the shame

and that which lasts forever.

The Nuns' Best Battle

When ISIS captured the nuns at Ma'lula and took them
to Idlib and put them in jail, the nuns on their knees
hid their crosses beneath their black habits and prayed
for their captors, prayed their white prayers in ISIS's
stone jail.

With all the sweet nuns on their knees in the jail
swords wouldn't sever, noose wouldn't tie, fire
wouldn't burn, stone wouldn't throw, death
wouldn't murder.

Evil ran off, afraid of the nuns,
in Idlib's dark jail.

They had to return them, had to return them,
had to return them when twenty three
women defeated jihadists from ISIS's dark
jail.

Other Lives

I am divided between what I remember truly
and what is not quite remembered
coming back to me now in pale visions.

I go to sleep in a cottage
where east and west
lake shore glacial morraines
are packed like fruitcakes with red and blue stones.
Dragged from the Arctic, they're still cold
after 10,000 years.
Here the owners of big glass houses
are the proud ones.

Wrapped in my white wool robe,
I lie on my Bokara rug, pillowed
on sand, and hear the small night sounds,
the far-away yelp of the long-eared desert fox,
rustle of thin grasses brushing
against each other when the desert mice
make their rounds on their small paths.
Above me, stars caught in the webs
of the lacy tent-top, glitter
like the angels' spangles.

I see the child herding sheep,
curly haired white ones
with long black faces
through the tall prairie grasses
where the spring winds still speak Alaska.

Or was it the long-haired black and brown ones
munching leathery desert shrubs?
Camel herders are the rich ones,
but we own only sheep and goats.

I think it is a lost life
that I long for. I cry
when I go to libraries
at the impossibility of reading.

Smug in My Ignorance
Syria, 1998

In Aleppo, old caravan town,
the Mukabarat patrolled my street
tried for nonchalance, their very frowns
frightened folks. Their shadows, indiscreet,

powerful, their white station wagons
recognizable. No uniforms
needed. Everyone knew their swagger.
They watched my going out, going in.

The Damascus diplomat phoned me.
"Terrorist threatens Americans
in Syria. Keep packed bags ready."
I did, but didn't believe danger.

Nothing happened then, and of course. I
thought it was only rumor laden
with excess caution, informer's lies.
She said his name: Osama bin Laden.

Spirit

How can we keep the Spirit
while the bombs bomb,
babies die, mothers cry, scream, rage?
Our ears — dry withered leaves,
our hearts — gravel and granite.
The war goes on and on
six years of blood and children are not enough.

What is enough, oh God,
what is enough?

What is enough Citizens?
What is enough Citizens of This World?

The Temple of Bel
Palmyra, Syria

The lizards still worship Yaribol,
the sun god, prostrating themselves
on the broken stones of the Temple of Bel.
They scamper over the toppled pillars
of Diocletian's Baths,
jump the crevasses of the shrine of Bel-Shamin,
Phoenician god of storms.

Black and brown goats pose irreverently
on the steps of the sacred cella
where Roman soldiers with solemn ceremony
stored their eagle-topped standards,
the silken flags of world conquest.

Greatness and power gone, a bedouin girl
with hennaed hands folds John's kufiah
correctly.

When I think of what can be left,
these monuments of broken glory,
and what I can leave you, my dear ones,
I know it's only some bits of paper
some ink which fades, a paltry offering.
The lizards don't last, nor the goats,
nor wanderers in the waste land.
But the old stones will tell their story
until the punctual sun and reflective moon
drop for the last time.
the stars hanging in their appointed places.*

Note
The last line is handwritten on an attached note; whether this was Struthers's final intention is not known.

Part C.
Ann Struthers's travels in the wider Mediterranean region.

The Ache of History
Struthers gave this title to three poems. There are 3 different versions of the third.

The Ache of History [poem 1]

the mist petal pink, peach, gold, the stubborn stump
of blindness dissolving, and for the church built into the wall
where he escaped in the basket of faith.

The old sureties surrendered: There is no Persia
in Iran, only the Ayatollah where the House of Knowledge stood
and Omar Khayyam studied mathematics.
In Saudi Arabia there is nothing allowed that is not Saudi,
no desert in Syria because everything is now desert.
There is no Iraq in Iraq and Jordan was manufactured too late.

When the war is exhausted, when justice
that means revenge is forgotten,
in a thousand years
I will make you a cup of tea, bring you a bottle
of Shark beer, proffer a glass of water, or a glass of wine.
On the door I will hang the blessed hand of Fatima,
the sacred star of David,
and the holy cross of Jesus. In the garden
we will plant a young olive tree for peace.

The Ache of History [poem 2]*

What is given is different in this
country. Paul takes a glass of wine for his
stomach. Linda and Mike take two; Peter
drinks three — no excuses. The Commander
of the Legions does not come; we discuss
his bribes, his summer house in the
mountains.
Helen flirts, Clytemnestra's smile is grim.
Cleo and Antony worry about
jealous Portia home in Rome, yet draw
toward each other, magnet to iron.

Maybe none of us can help ourselves to
become better. We are a motley crew,
lovers, murderers, martyrs, small-time crooks
taking bread from the poor.
Zachariah
changed. Mary Magdalene, and a few poor
fishermen, geniuses for punishment,
Saul of Tarsus transformed into Saint Paul,
tent-maker, traveler, light-struck thinker,
man for the times, gloriously fallible.

Note
This material appears in "Plebas the Phoenician" in the collection, "After Babylon."

The Ache of History [version 1]

Old friends from books,
Edward Said — Holy City of Jerusalem.
Mahmoud Darwish — Holy Village, Al Birwa.
Homes where you could never go back.

Holy war spitting*
Holy broken countries.

What is history
but a broken promise,
the refugee and the orphan,
the ache of our age?
The ache and the awful holiness.

*In two versions, the text reads "spitting," but the third reads "splitting."

The Ache of History [version 2]

Edward Said — Holy City of Jerusalem.
Mahmoud Darwish — Holy Village. Al Birwa,
homes where both of you could never go back.

Holy war splitting
Holy broken countries.

Old friends from books,
what is history
but a broken promise,
the refugee and the orphan,
the ache of our age?

The ache and
the awful holiness.

[**The Ache of History** version 3]

Flower Roads

Old friends from books,
who lost two countries,
gone down like the lighthouse at Alexandria,
lost the road of spring lilacs,
fields of blue iris on hillsides where squatters
live in the ruins, an old church, it's roof rotted
in 1487, its stones mined for shelter, blue tarps
for walls, yet a generous gift to watch
the evening sun gilding the stones.

Oh Exiles, sunk with the Colossus of Rhoes,
what is history
but a broken promise,
the refugee and the orphan,
the ache of our age?

Holy City of Jerusalem, of Gethsemane,
Holy mosque at Al Birwa beneath the olive trees,
Holy War spitting
Holy Broken Countries.
Oh, Mahmoud Darwish, Edward Said,
the world has lost too much.

Assignation on Rhodes

Little white room nailed to the mountainside,
surge of the sea between us all night.

Fear in the Middle

I have watched sunset in Beirut while strolling the Cornish;
sunset from the escarpment at Wadi Rum where Lawrence camped;
watched the sun sink in Colombo, Sri Lanka, when dusk
beckons forth thousands of giant bats, silent and ominous.

On the dock tonight at Iowa's Methodist Camp
on Lake Okoboji, same falling sun, same neutral sky. Here in peace
I think of Beirut where ragged eyes from mortar shells
still look down from their vacant sockets,
and Aqaba, where the Palestinian refugees
stare across the straits at Eliat,
and long for their homes in Israel,
and Colombo where my old friend still finds slivers of glass
working out from his face when he shaves every morning —
suicide bomber and he was too close to the window.

Insulation, isolation, safety in the middle
of the middle but I hear the drums of aggression
and arrogance from Washington, D. C.,
and I fear, oh, I fear for my country.

Frankincense

In the University of Kuwait's guest house
a tall brass urn smokes, lifts a translucent genie
that wavers, dances slow for us, the honored guests,
not the clinging smell of joss sticks in the sixties,
or the tiny pellets my 30's grandmother
lit in the gilded lap of a plaster goddess,
this is amber-colored rosin tears from Somalia.
They smolder with the same scent that wafted
through the Great Temple in Jerusalem,
that burned before the statue of Poseidon
high above the sea at Point Sounion,
that in Rome wreathed about the statues
of Emperors who declared themselves gods.

Tonight in Kuwait City at Mai's banquet for women
we all dance the native dances: sinuous and sensuous belly dances!
When the party's over, her maid brings a lighted censer
of frankincense, swings it beneath our armpits,
perfuming us before we go home to our husbands.
Our blood races from the wild dancing,
and we are slick and sleek with sweat,
and surely, now, we are all goddesses.

3 March 2005

Greece: Coastal Road to Sunium

Rusty caravans
squat beside Aegean's waves
that lisp Homer's poems.

Displaced from wayside
shrines by Christian saints, I feel
sad for the old gods.

Lord Byron's name carved
on marble pillar. Mine on
insubstantial air.

Note
Published in the *Lilliput Review* #161, March 2008.

I Think of Virgil's Farmer

I think of Virgil's farmer; he counts his sheep,
pulls the burrs from their wool;
his dog, black as a mulberry, stands beside him,
tail wags, tongue hangs out. I watch him lug a rock
on the steep terrace, shove it into a wall;
prune back grapevines for new growth,
drive the plowshare into the recalcitrant earth.

He comes home at sundown, washes under the
plane tree
by the door, sits down to brown bread and cheese,
a comb of honey. This man doesn't care
whether words are felicitous — the pigeon his
gossip,
the crow his depravity, the hawk his eloquence.

At Bergma where Mark Antony stole the library
and shipped it to Cleopatra, a farmer makes hay
by the ruins of Hadrian's Gate, a scythe in hand.
Grass and flowers fall beside the broken columns.

Books mold, paper crumbles, the stolen library
burns at Alexandria; poetry goes up in smoke,
science flakes in the ashes,.
Who wastes a life on words should know better.
Rocks remain. Burrs keep growing.

c. 2013

Kuwait Desert

Delicate desert grass,
bends with the wind. Its tassels trace
half moons in the sand,
desert truffles break the crust, emerge
from their hiding places. In spring
diplotaxis acaris paints the sand
with miles and miles of purple petals.
Dark red heads of allium nod,
not telling their secrets.
We take our old, enormous tents,
hand made by the grandmothers, the tops
of black sheep's wool, woven loosely
so the heat escapes, so in the night
we can see the stars caught in its net.
We camp for a week remembering the days
when we all were Bedouin.

The children watch shy, giant lizards,
catch glimpses of the tiny jerboa
leaping like a kangaroo; at first light
the big-eared desert fox slinks off
over the pink hills to his den.

The desert's thin crust
has been ripped by bunkers, trenches,
tank treads. Summer sand storms
come sooner, are dustier, last longer.
The oil lakes left when the Iraqis
trashed the oil wells still attract and trap
birds, dragonflies and painted ladies,
and the skeletons of burned out
command cars, jeeps, half-tracks
will last forever in the dry,
uncompromising air.

Lot's Wife

The truth was, I didn't want to leave
my house, small, neat, the fireplace
outside the door with a flue that finally
drew! And my loom! I could have dismantled
it and tied it onto a camel, but you know
how those beasts are, always rubbing up against
something, trying to lighten their load.
I was afraid they'd be suspicious, but I left it.
It would have been kindling before we arrived
at where ever he was going — even he didn't know
where or how long, or how many murderous
bandits
along the way. I'm old. I've worked hard. Raised
all those children who are elated for adventure.
All I want is my garden, my house, my weaving,
a little peace and quiet. So I looked back
and that night, before we were out of sight of Ur,
I left them, made my way home.
When they couldn't find me, they made up this story
about the pillar of salt, but it wasn't me.
I was home, cooking a pot of lentils, carding wool,
puttering around in the blessed silence.

c. 2017

Mosaics at Carthage

I

Ah Virgil, there you are between the Muse
of History and the Muse of Tragic Poetry
with her great, sorrowful mask,
holding the script showing
the Iliad's eighth line.
And Ulysses is safely tied to the mast,
grinning in delight while the sirens
disport themselves and sing.
Diana still carries her bow, wears her lapis lazuli
dress,
Venus rides a compliant tiger.

II

Rome still decaying in the dust of the past,
Carthage in ruins and in memory. I sit on a stone
eat my lunch of bread, cheese, blood oranges,
and think of you, Miss Murray, Miss Mills, Miss
Lloyd,
who taught me more than I knew.
I look down from the broken walls of old villas
onto the floors of *terrace,** peering into rooms
of ancient houses. Dido's house is here
somewhere lost in the ruins, she who went out
in flames. But these quiet stones are your houses,
old professors. You lived here long before I came
to pay you this small tribute.
Today five kinds of yellow flowers bloom
among the broken marble, daisies, buttercups,
wild mustard, two kinds I don't know,
and beside me grows a hedge of rosemary
for remembrance.

17 February 2005

Note
I have puzzled over this word choice. I suspect the intended word was "terrazzo." Editor.

Near Mithymna, Greece

Young mower, scythe, ready for work
whet stone in his pocket, scythe, tall handle
called the snatch, sturdy nibs, walks a rhythm:
lift, swing, pull fast, whish, hiss of the blade
hungry for hay

through a field punctuated by stones.
They might be a crumbled temple,
small, broken parts of a Parthenon,
or graveyard stele,
and the poppies, punctuating the grasses
fall with their red lips
kissing the gnarled stones.

Open and Closed

Pass through Hadrian's gate
from ancient ruins to modern ones,
pass gates of interdiction,
and invitation. Greek accordion
plays; boots beat paving stones,
dancers' line entwines
grape-vine-like, flies off into motion,
electric under Plaka's winedark moon.
Still fear of closed doors,
of gypsies with muzzled bears,
fascination for the pearl-white sea
at the past's furtherest extremity,
the overwhelming ballet of water
which is desire — and fear of drowning.

Palm Trees

Huge semis move slow as funeral trains
through the boulevards of Kuwait City
loaded with live palm trees, their roots
swaddled in net, to be planted
along the thoroughfares
where they will be watered every day.
The Iraqis let all the others die —
and the zoo animals, fired the planetarium,
burned the famous German telescope,
anchored in bedrock which they could not
loosen like all the other scientific instruments
they crated and shipped back to Bagdad.

The palms lie stiff
as virgins waiting for Bluebeard.
Soon their metallic fronds will click
like finger cymbals in the wind out of Basra,
soon there will be grass, flowers,
and eventually the women,
forced to watch street-corner executions,
will stop crying.

Pizza

Not far from St. Peter's
Attilio stands at a small table
all day, mixes and rolls out dough,
makes designs of pink pomodoro.
covers thin white skins with formaggio and fungi.
His quick knife cuts a kilo
for a small nun. His brother tends the oven,
shunts another batch behind its iron eye --
Attilio calls him Fausto,
and we all eat his bread
drink his cheap wine,
and place our bets,
for or against his name.

The Pizza of Heaven

One small nun, long grey skirts,
white starched headdress,
rigid wimple, lifting her little chin,
lays her coins on the counter,
accepts three kilos of pizza
wrapped in white paper
and tied with string from Faustus,
who tends the brick oven, pulls out
another rectangular pan: fresh scent of fungi
and Tyrolean mountain mozzarella
here in an alley in Rome close to St. Peters,
surely a way station on the road to paradise.

Note
In the Struthers papers appears a slightly different version, in which the title is different and the final lines are rearranged.

Heaven is Where You Find It

[final lines]

here in an alley in Rome
close to St. Peters,
surely a way station
on the road to paradise.

Prester John

The Holy Father, needing bodies
for the siege of Jerusalem
sent a begging letter to Prester John,
blood link to one of the Magi, who was mighty
in Africa, or India, or beyond Persia
and Armenia, in a country rich with grouse,
pheasants, ivory cows whose milk was thicker
than cream, where strawberries and rubies
grew the same size, and the sea washed
open pockets of diamonds. But Prester John,
who wore no jewel and tilled his own garden,
never crossed the Tigris.

The Euphrates of my grief is not fordable
and the flag of my soul
is a dirty rag in tatters.
The infidel in Jerusalem is less a threat
than the infidel inside the citadel of ribs
and the traitor curled in the round bone tower

Pursued

She remembered how the wind rattled the loose
panes,
shaking the old house like a dog shakes a rabbit,
smelled the worn wood, flaking kalsomine,
crumbling plaster, saw the neatly granulated
mount of dirt in the cellar which the rat left,
heard him swish back into his mystery.
He was too clever for traps,
disdained poison. But he kept his rodent place,
rarely emerged in the daytime,
but she knew he was the rat of corruption,
brought the dream of the Arabian bazaar —
intolerable white sun on white bricks --
she escaping across flat rooftops,
around a low dome, then inexplicably
in a narrow, walled street, shade deepening,
walls closing in, getting narrower and narrower.

The Return

wasn't really a return;
the person who came back
was different. I scarcely recognized her,
her mind, her character, her exotic adventures
among the Bedouin, her handmade silver necklace,
silver beads dangling, her new book of date palms
and sand, casket of songs from the oud and the
reed flute,
and her journeys on a camel in a long caravan
sailing across the desert.

Seed

Going out, distancing myself from the jeweled
world,
Preparing for the long night when, perhaps,
The old corpses will rise up in the graveyard
As Hardy said they did.

But they rose to disillusion, and I lie down in it,
Having seen a world in which the worst
Prospered and the best died in ovens,
Or hacked to death by their neighbors,
Or shot by child-conscripts,
Or burned alive at the World Trade Center,
Or starved while the Sri Lankan official
Bought his fat mistress diamonds and stuffed
His Swiss bank account. The tide
Of human misery becomes tsunami.

After the wave washes over,
What plant will grow?

Maybe that ragged weed, hope.

Sightseeing on the Persian Gulf

Sightseeing from a boat
that once fished for pearls,
that once brought ebony from Somalia,
its mast and square sail removed,
only the wooden hull authentic,
our motorized dhow, canopied against
the brutal sun, cruises slowly
up the coast; children playing
in the water wave to us, young men
on Ski-Dos try to splash us
for the sport of it. We laugh
and call to them.

Families on the beaches —
here and there a clutch of women.
Fully clothed, their black abiyahs
cover their arms, the hoods
hiding their hair. Like cormorants
they sit in the water,
The hands of the sea caress them.

Spaghetti Western

Virgil was the Lone Scout,
capturing two exotic creatures, poetry and culture,
"Primus ego in patria mecum... deducam Musas"
bringing them back to his home village on the
Mincio.
to his father's fields, "sloping down to the river
and to the old beech trees with broken tops."
These would have escaped a lesser hunter,
but did the rough farmers care? Were their vines
and olive trees, meadows, more fertile,
their harvests more bountiful?
Did the barley, shaking their beards
in the wind off the mountains, change?
Were the stones in the field softened?
or diminished?
Did the village elders begin to spout sonnets?
or lithesome girls sing odes
while they carried the water jars
home from the well?

What happened, happened.
What did not happen is not written,
but probably time shuffled on in much the same
way.
What happened to the Scout
because of his efforts is more important.
Ride your white horse
across the Tucson hills, Virgil,
the arrows of death and destruction
have not yet touched you.

Supper in Rethimnon, Crete

I could smell the inheritance of honey
as the wax melted and the feathers fell,
drifted like snowflakes. I beat the ribs
trapped to my arms as fast as I could,
but I stumbled on air, turned, tumbled,
catapulted down as far as I had gone up —
the green caverns of the sea as commodious
as the blue ones of the sky.
There the curious fish I fed, fed the fish
that fed the fish on your plate.
You sit on the terrace under the grape arbor,
the grapes beginning to blush with color,
and pause, fork uplifted, remembering something.
The cafe cats complain softly,
rub against your leg, beg
for a taste of my bones.

To Our Mothers

Someone, I tell you, will remember us.
Sappho

We think of you, dear, dead women who sleep
in narrow beds, who do not hear or speak
of your suffering and your pain, who keep
silence. Clara Barton, who proved the weak
were not women, strong amidst screams, stenches,
squalor of field hospitals. The unseen
hundreds burned at Martyrs' stakes for witches.
The agony of Mary Magdalene
when Christ was nailed upon the cross to die.
Your fight's not won — the awful smell of war
still spews over earth; superstition cries;
Pontius Pilate lives, but we wear your scars
like bright badges, your beliefs like gold crowns;
hold your names holy till the last star drowns.

c. 2017

Waiting for the Fire
Damascus

Shepherds in long striped cloaks
guide their woolly charges through cacophinious traffic
toward the Ummayad Mosque
where they tether the bleating creatures
near the doors for the Feast of the Eid.

Lambs sorrowful eyes seem to know
that concrete avenues, high stone walls
bode them no good. Even the family
who takes one home in the back of the pick-up
clasped between the mother, grandmother
and the children, will give it only the ritual prayer
and then the ritual knife, one quick slice
across the throat, blood on the sidewalk,
cleaned quickly, and then the living coals.

11/18/2013

Wiping out Error

The Taliban, intent on wiping out error
And affronts to true religion, fired explosives,
Shattered the Buddhas, one 120 feet tall,
The other, 75 feet, both wearing ribbed robes,
Great flat faces serene,
Toes planted firmly at cliff's base.
But I tell you,
Even the shards are precious and I, no Buddhist,
Will come some day to Bamian and lay
A necklace of marigolds at the place
Where their stone feet stood,
And the marigolds will swell up
In that sacred niche and burst out
In enormous golden songs.

The Writer in Cairo Airport

Bob Drexler writes in airports, finds the muse
of each place, Bangkok, Ho Chi Min City, Chang Mai.
Why can't I transport myself elsewhere? Concentrate?
My mind's as energetic as soggy toast, void of imagination
as the departure's monitor. I find fatigue sitting
on my shoulders, ennui resting on my eyelids,
my genie asleep or gone on another flight.
Oh, genie, come back from Abu Dhabi,
Pago Pago, or Timbuktu.

Zar for Nadya
(exorcising an evil spirit)

Inside the dirt-walled compound,
the bonfire flickers, scares wobbly shadows,
pulls back the curtain of illumination,
then closes its shaky curtains. The holy man
has ordered it and many candles
because Hassan's youngest wife's spirit*
is stubborn. It demands perfume,
frankincense, a banquet with pomegranates,
pineapples, dates, coconuts, carrots.
It shrieks for musicians, one with bendir,
one with rik, one with darbuka.
It insists on two players of pipes,
and to put it in a good mood,
dancing by ghawazee.

Late in the evening, the drums begin,
and Nadya, ecstatic, rolls on the ground.
She yelps, meows, moos, crawls on all fours.
Holy man signals pipes to play as smooth
as the Nile at night. She stretches one arm.
Drums cough soft, slow. She stretches
the other, rows like oars in the water.
Pipes lisp the ocean waves at Alexandria.
She stands up, wades in the surf, splashes.
Drums beat surf against the sea wall. Drive shells
through cement, pound sand through stone.
Insist on the permeability of bone and flesh.
Come out! Come out! they shout. Holy man
opens her mouth, tugs at her tongue,
commands, "Be gone! Be gone!"
She tears her hair, screams, collapses.
Many of us see it depart, sliding
along the electric wires following the road,
sliding, sliding, glowing in the dark
as it departs.

Note
spirit: The original text reads "efriht." I have guessed that this is a typo, but it may be an Arabic word that means something like spirit or demon.

Acknowledgments

These notes are taken from *Aleppo Burning* and from several chapbooks that Struthers prepared for publication that did not find publishers. Struthers did not provide details of the publications — dates, issue numbers, pages. It is likely, as well, that some the above poems not listed here were published elsewhere. Readers wishing to know more details may consult the Ann Struthers Papers in the Geroge Henry archives of the Stewart Memorial Library at Coe College, Cedar Rapids, IA.

"After Babylon," *the new renaissance*
"After the General's Kisses," *The North Central Review*
"Aubade for Aleppo," *Crab Creek Review*
"Black Coffee," *Southern Humanities Review*
"Bones," *The Iowa Review,* and at *The Weekly Palette*
"Dancing among Women," *Licking River Review,* nominated for a Pushcart Prize
"Danger," slightly revised, in the *Coe Review*
"Diwali," "Envy," and "Jerboa," *The Kerf*
"Dogs in Syria," *Colere*
"Dogs in Syria" and "Danger, Doors in Damascus," *The Coe Review*
"Exiles" in *Zymbol (*Dublin, Ireland)
"First Draft," *Byline*
"Footprints at Ain-Dara," the anthology, *Knowing Stones*
"Horses" *The Briar Cliff Review,* nominated for a Pushcart Prize
"Jesus as Tourist" in the *Presbyterian Record* (Canada)
"Last Doctors in Aleppo," *The Coe Review*
"Mother Country," *The Midwest Quarterly*
"My Country, My Family," *The American Scholar*
"Open and Closed," *Caesura*
"Phlebas the Phoenician" *The Briar Cliff Review*
"Remembering the Moon" *Potpourri*
"Ruins at Cyrrhus" *Sukoon* (Dubai)
"Sestina for Syrian Monuments in *The North American Review*
"Spitting in the Wind," *Out of Line*
"St. Simeon the Stylites, *the new renaissance*
"Star Routes," *Zone 3*
"Strolling on Shara Nile during the Feast of the Eid," *Colere*
"Strolling on Shara Nile," *The Iowa Review,* and at *The Weekly Palette*
"Sufi Dancing in Aleppo," *Poetry International*
"Sunday Afternoon during Ramadan with a Christian Family in Aleppo, Syria," *The Christian Century*
"Syrian Roses" *The Iowa Review,* and at *The Weekly Palette*
"The End of Democracy," *Colere*
"The End of the Day," *The Iowa Review,* and at *The Weekly Palette*
"The Fires around Us," the *Hampden-Sydney Poetry Review*
"The General's Village Near Tartus," *the new renaissance*
"The Kurds Olive Orchard at Ifrin," *The North American Review*
"The Tomb of Queen sub-ad at Ur," *the new renaissance*, 2nd prize in their annual judging of all the poems in the journal during that year
"The Watchers," *The Briar Cliff Review*

"True Miracles," *The Coe Review*
"Two Lives of Aleppo's Children's Hospital," *TAB*
"When it Snowed in Damascus," *The Christian Century*
"Wild flowers, Stolid Stones," *The Briar Cliff Review*